

LOVAT DICKSON'S MAGAZINE

A MAGAZINE FOR THOUGHTFUL PEOPLE

VOLUME 3

DECEMBER, 1934

NUMBER 6

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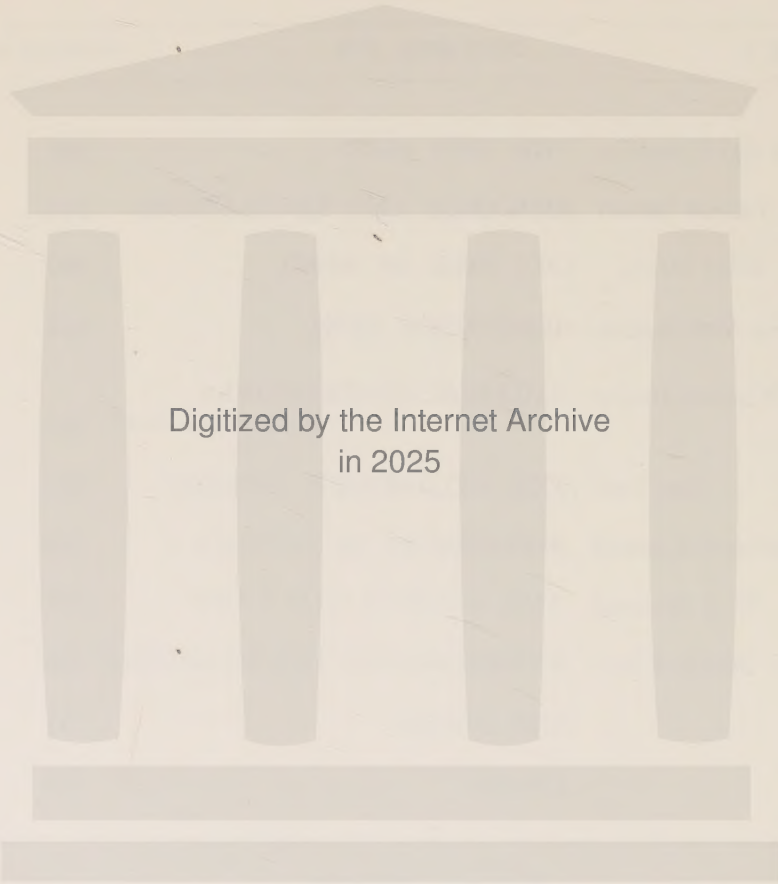
PUBLISHED MONTHLY

Editor: LOVAT DICKSON

Assistant Editor: MAURICE E. FRY

The Editor will be glad to consider MSS. offered for publication and will endeavour to return unsuitable MSS. when they are accompanied by a stamped envelope. Neither the acceptance of and payment for a contribution, nor the sending of a proof, can be regarded as a guarantee of publication.

Editorial, Advertising and General Business Offices: 38 Bedford Street, Strand, London, W.C.2. Annual subscription, inland, twelve shillings, post paid: abroad, fourteen shillings, post paid.



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LUIGI PIRANDELLO

*The New Suit*¹

THE suit that Crispucci had worn since time immemorial never seemed, somehow, like a suit—like a thing separate from his body, a thing to be renewed; the poor old messenger in his faded suit was just like a shabby old dog in its faded fur. So the lawyer Boccanera, his employer, when he happened to have a garment to give away, never thought of offering it to Crispucci. And then, why bother? Exactly as he was, he was invaluable—as messenger and general factotum at a hundred and fifty lire a month. You could save your breath with Crispucci; he caught your meaning on the wing; a half jerk of the head and a wink, and he'd tumbled to everything.

But to-day he seemed tumbling to nothing—absolutely nothing! The lawyer, seated at his desk, had been talking and talking to him, long and affectionately, explaining and persuading; but Crispucci, standing before him with bent head, his feeble body drooping like an S, his monkey's arms dangling at his sides, didn't seem to be taking in a word.

Now and then he would open his mouth—but not to speak. His parchment face contracted in a grin, a sort of convulsion

¹ English Version by Joan Redfern.

of his cheeks that laid bare his teeth—a grimace of scorn or of anguish, or perhaps just a sign that he was listening. His eyes, fixed very wide in a captious stare, looked straight in front of him.

The lawyer was speaking :

“ Well, everything considered, you’d better go. Go for a fortnight, and have a look at things on the spot. I shall miss you, of course, miss you very badly; but I’ll have to put up with it. It will take at least a fortnight to fix up affairs. Take longer if you need it. You see, there’ll be all the formalities. And then, of course, you’ll sell.”

Crispucci opened his arms and let them fall again.

“ I advise you to sell—advise you most strongly. Get rid of everything—jewels, clothes, furniture, everything—and bank the money. The big money, of course, is in the jewels. There’s the pearl necklace, a fortune in itself. From this rough glance I’ve had at the inventory I should assess the whole . . . well, let us say . . . let us say at between a hundred and fifty and two hundred thousand lire. Perhaps more. The clothes . . . hm ! . . . the clothes. . . Don’t count on getting much for *them*. But all the same, better sell. They’d be quite unsuitable for your daughter (one can imagine the type of clothes !). The furs, I think, may be valuable—if you’re smart you might do pretty well on them. (Oh, by the way, about the jewels. . . . You had better find out what shops they were bought at—have a look in the cases, in the lids.) I must warn you that diamonds have depreciated. Oh, very badly, very badly indeed; and there are a good few on this list. Here ! . . . diamond brooch . . . diamond brooch . . . diamond ring . . . bracelet . . . brooch . . . bracelet . . . ring . . . ring. . . . A good few, as you see——”

He stopped. Crispucci had raised a hand—a sign that he wanted to speak. On the rare occasions that he wanted to

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speak he announced it like this. His face twitched and contracted, in the effort of fishing up his voice from the abyss of silence his soul had been sunk in for so long.

"C-could," he said, "could I dare to offer . . . one of those r-rings—to your lady?"

"To my wife? . . . My *dear* Crispucci! . . . Whatever are you thinking of! To my *wife*! . . ."

Crispucci let fall his hand:

"Excuse me."

"Excuse? No, no, my dear fellow, I thank you. What! . . . you're not crying? . . . Come, come! . . . pull yourself together! I didn't mean to offend you. But I know what you're feeling. I know. I understand. This fortune's a queer . . . ahem! . . . a doubtful sort of affair. But you're not taking it for yourself. You've got to think of your daughter. A girl without a dowry in these days . . . and . . . er—unfortunately situated. . . . Uhm! you'd find it hard to marry her. . . . Money's money. Where there's money people wink at a lot. . . . And haven't you a mother? You must think of her too. And you know, my dear fellow, we none of us get younger, and your health, lately, has been none too good——"

At each consideration of the lawyer Crispucci had nodded desolately; at this last about his health he bowed, and made to go out.

"Heh!" cried the lawyer, "heh! . . . come back! You're forgetting the papers." He pushed them across to him.

Crispucci took them, drying his eyes with a soiled handkerchief.

"So you'll leave to-morrow," said the lawyer, with finality.

"Sir," began the messenger. He seemed to have decided to say something. Then he stopped. Raising his shoulders slightly and opening his arms, he turned, and went out.

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He'd been about to say :

" Sir, I'll leave to-morrow, if Your Honour will accept one of those rings for your lady."

For three days in the office the clerks had been baiting him—pricking and baiting him with cold ferocity. Grinding his teeth he'd been throwing them bits of the offal. To one he had promised a dress for his wife—a dress of rich silk, trimmed with lace; to another some ostrich feathers for his daughter; to a third a muff for his fiancée.

" And could you do with a couple of the nightgowns, very thin and filmy, for your sister ? "

" Thanks, old chap. Why not ? "

He wanted everyone, yes everyone, to be soiled, to be smirched like himself, by that legacy.

Reading of the magnificent wardrobe of the deceased, the extraordinary supply of lingerie in the cupboards and trunks, he felt he could have supplied the town, the whole female population, with underclothes. If a remains of sanity hadn't held him back he'd have seized on every man that he met, and said to him :

" Look here ! My wife was a whore. She's just croaked in Naples and left me her underclothes. Can I oblige you with some silk stockings, some chemises, some nightdresses, for your wife, or your sister . . . ? "

Among the clerks in the office was a newcomer—a young man who had been engaged just a week : a jaundiced, small young man, bald and rickety, who had the melancholy fad of wanting to be elegant. Though less a clerk than a messenger, he was condescending; spoke very rarely, and when spoken to would answer with a smile, vain and empty, while he shot out his yellowish cuffs, or pushed them back, with an affected gesture. While the old fellow had been offering

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those gifts to the others, he had nearly burst from bile and vexation.

When Crispucci emerged from his talk with the lawyer, and took his hat and stick from the stand, preparatory to leaving, the youth followed him down the stairs.

(From the height of the staircase the others were jeering :

“ I say, remember the nightie, one of the filmy ones. . . . Come back with that dress. . . . Don't forget the feathers. . . . Remember the muff for my best girl. . . .”)

In the street he accosted him :

“ Are you mad ? ” he said angrily. “ Have you gone quite dotty ? Whatever are you thinking of ? Those clothes are worth keeping. Who's to know where they came from ? Are they labelled, by chance ? . . . You've a stroke of luck like this, and don't know what to do with it ! My God ! what a fool ! . . . ”

Crispucci stopped. He looked him up and down with narrowed eyes, venomously.

“ Yes, luck,” said the other. “ Luck, first, that she ran away from you——”

“ Oh, you've been making inquiries, have you ? ”

“ Certainly. Why not ? Well, now you've the luck that she's dead, and has bequeathed you——”

Crispucci looked at him closer :

“ Has anyone told you, by chance, that I've a daughter to marry ? ”

“ Of course. That's just what I'm driving at.”

“ You're frank, at least.”

“ As frank as can be.”

“ You'd like me to accept that legacy ? ”

“ You'd be stark, staring mad to refuse it. With two hundred thousand lire you'd——”

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"With two hundred thousand lire you'd expect me to give you my daughter?"

"Why not?"

"Because—well, it's evident. With two hundred thousand lire I could afford her a husband less dirty than you——"

"You insult me!"

"Not at all. I respect you. You respect me, and I respect you. Let us speak plainly. For the foul dishonour of giving you my daughter I'd run . . . say . . . well, to *three* thousand lire. No more."

"What? . . . Only three? . . ."

"Well, I might raise it to five. Yes, to five. And I tell you what—I'll throw in some bits of lingerie. There! . . . You've a sister, haven't you? Well, three chemises for your sister—trimmed with lace, open in front——"

And with that he swung on his heel, and left him, in the middle of the piazza.

Arrived home he went to his room. Not a word did he speak. His mother and daughter watched him silently. For sixteen years, since the day his wife had left him, he had exchanged not a word with either mother or daughter, except where the needs of the household demanded it. If either approached him in the least degree, he'd turn and look at her—a look that froze her into silence.

On the following day he started for Naples, leaving them in anguished uncertainty, not only about the legacy, but also from the fear—God help them!—that he'd commit some folly, some madness. . . .

The neighbours, flitting in and out, fermented this fear, recalling and discussing endlessly the eccentric behaviour of Crispucci since he'd learnt of the legacy. One of them, alluding to the deceased, said ingenuously:

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"But why was she so rich?"

And another:

"But I thought she was called 'Margherita.' Then why is her linen marked 'G. C.'?"

"No no, not 'G'—'R. C.'—'Rosa Clairon.'"

"O-oh! . . . Fancy! . . . Rosa Clairon. Wasn't she a singer?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Oh, yes, she was—for a bit. Then she stopped."

"Rosa Clairon. . . Yes . . . yes . . . I seem to remember. . ."

Tina, the girl, listened to them in silence, a flush on her cheeks and a flame as of fever in her sunken eyes. The old grandmother, seated on the sofa, adjusted her spectacles on her heavy nose and stared into her lap. Her spectacles, since her operation for cataract, enlarged her eyes monstrously, and made her scanty eyelashes look the legs of a spider. Now and then, listening to the chatter, she would grunt, dully.

What the neighbours were most concerned with were the clothes. Now why should Crispucci be mad because he gave them away? If the poor fellow didn't want to sell them, then what more natural than to give them as presents? Certainly he wouldn't want them for his daughter—to have her pure, immaculate young body polluted. A young girl could never, never wear them. . . . But . . . well, if he was giving them away, then surely they, as neighbours, would come in for some trifles—just a few little presents, as a neighbourly politeness. They might even have their pick. . . . Who knows, in the next weeks, what clothes he'd bring back with him—what lengths of shining silk, what feathers, what velvets, what marvellous stuffs would be brightening that squalid apartment, those poor, miserable rooms. . . . At the thought of them their eyes glistened. Tina, watching them,

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felt her heart pound; she twisted her thin hands upon her apron; and at last sprang up and left the room.

"Poor girl . . .," sighed someone. "How sad! . . ."

"Will her father put her into black?" said another.

"Of course she'll be in black," said a third.

"After all, it was her own mother. . . ."

"Mark my words . . . he'll go into black too."

"He? Oh no, not *he*. . . ."

"That is, if he accepts the legacy. . . ."

The grandmother shifted on her sofa, as Tina on her bed in the room next door. This, *this* was the doubt—the horrible doubt that was keeping them in a fever: Would he, or would he not, accept the legacy? . . .

The preceding day they had gone, very secretly, both of them, to the lawyer, and with clasped hands and tears on their faces, had begged, had implored him to help them—to persuade Crispucci to accept it, to prevent him committing the folly he threatened. If he died, what was to become of them? What was to become of his girl, who never, never, since the day she was born, had tasted of the pleasures and joys of youth. Day by day she had paid for the fault of her mother, must she now be sacrificed to the pride of her father? . . .

For three weeks they waited in doubt. Not a line, not a message nor rumour in those three weeks. They seemed an eternity. At last, one evening, came a loud bumping on the stairs, the poor, miserable stairs that led to their apartment. Up and up, till the fourth floor, climbed three porters from the station, bearing on their shoulders cases and trunks. Four journeys did they make, up and down those stairs. Between trunks and cases they deposited eleven pieces, immense and heavy.

Below in the hall stood Crispucci, waiting till they'd all been deposited. He paid the porters, and again the staircase

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was quiet. Then he began to climb it himself, slowly, slowly.

His mother and daughter were on the landing, waiting for him, lighting his progress with a candle. They were trembling and silent. At last they saw him appear, with a new greenish hat on his head, and in a badly-fitting suit, brand new, in tobacco brown, bought evidently from a reach-me-down shop in the city. His trousers, new too, hung over his boots; his jacket rose at the back above his collar.

Neither of the women dared speak. The suit spoke for itself. At last Tina, on seeing him go straight to his bedroom, said timidly :

“ Father, have you had your supper ? ”

Crispucci, from the threshold of his room, turned his face, and replied, with a laughing grimace and a brand-new voice :

“ *Wagon-restaurant !* ”

VINCENT SHEEAN

Romance and Revolution

I

DURING the winter of 1926-27, after adventures as a foreign correspondent ranging from Geneva and the League of Nations to Persia and the Rif, I came to think, reading the contradictory and sketchy reports in the London and Paris papers, that the Chinese Revolution in its present stage was an event—a whole school of events—that I could hardly bear to miss. Certain kinds of events to which newspapers gave their attention had had this effect on me for years, and had to be explained (when I thought of it) by the antique fancy that newspaper men, like fire horses, could never outgrow their instinct for the “game.” It seems to me now that this was no explanation, for the events that aroused my fire-horse instinct were not, actually, the ones the newspapers found most interesting. The events that aroused in me the desire to attend, to witness, were invariably those in which large numbers of men were engaged in some difficult enterprise involving a fundamental idea—an idea of race, class, or even of nation. In what looked like the impending triumph of the Chinese Revolution there was an event of the exact kind that excited my imagination to the utmost. Without regard

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to what kind of job I might do in China, I wanted above all to get there; and eventually, with the help of the North American Newspaper Alliance, I did.

I

I arrived in China at the most fateful moment of the national revolution, that in which the victors surveyed the field and took stock of themselves. It was not a good moment for a journalist: from the professional point of view, I was too late. The capture of Shanghai and the sack of Nanking had been the high points of interest for the newspapers in America, and by the time I got to Shanghai the "story," as we say in the language of the trade, was already fading into obscurity. Moreover, the particular kind of personal exploit that my employers wanted of me—what they called, in their cabled instructions, "personal adventures"—proved impossible in a country where, so far as I could discover, all the inhabitants when treated with courtesy were invariably courteous and kind. I made various attempts to encounter "personal adventures" in parts of China from which all foreigners had fled, and never got so much as a harsh word out of any Chinese. Consequently the whole result of my experience in China was, so far as my newspapers were concerned, flat failure.

But from another point of view, the one adopted in this narrative, the experience was richer in consequences than any other I have to record. Here, for the first time, I began to approach the fundamental meaning of those vast disturbances that had fascinated me (in part unconsciously) for years—began to be able to discern the general under the particular, to take what Borodin called "the long view." In my first direct meeting with the Bolshevik philosophy in action (even in rather circumscribed action) I was disturbed

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by the precision with which it answered the questions I had begun to think unanswerable—the questions of a sensible relationship between one life and the many. Whether the Bolshevik solutions were the correct ones was another matter, which might take a long time to determine, but they were at least solutions, and represented the effort of human thought to bring order into the chaos that on every side oppressed and appalled the imagination.

I do not mean to say, of course, that I had known nothing about the Communist view of life before I went to China. I had as much acquaintance with it as most people have,—perhaps more,—and had even read a certain amount of its literature, including huge indigestible lumps of Karl Marx. But the difference between an academic acquaintance with Communism and an actual perception of its spirit is very great. The step required to pass from the first state to the second is so easy that it may be accomplished in a moment, and so difficult that it may involve the effort of a lifetime. It may be compared, I think, to the step by which, at an equally momentous frontier in literature, we pass into the world created by the *Divina Commedia*.

Every schoolboy knows about the *Divina Commedia*: how Dante, having lost his way in a dark wood, was found by Virgil and conducted into the depths of Hell, rising from there to Purgatory and to the circles of Paradise, through which he was led by the blessed Beatrice. But this knowledge of the vast, perfect poem is no knowledge at all; it is like being told in the schoolroom that Paris is the capital of France, a bald statement that can only become a living fact when we have smelled the acacias and eaten the food and investigated the literature that make it true. With Dante the difficulty of the language supplies another barrier (even for Italians); but when the step has at last been taken, the

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barrier passed, we enter a world in which all parts of the structure of existence are so related and harmonised, so subjugated to a sovereign system, that its ordered beauty and majesty give us the sensation of a new form of life, as if we had actually moved off into space and taken up our abode, for a time, on another star.

Such miraculous translations are rare and difficult; it took me thirty-four years to set foot inside the world of Dante. The world of Lenin (which is, in effect, all around us) can be entered in a moment, but only if the disposition of circumstances, persons, influences, can conquer the laziness of a bourgeois mind. The required combinations occurred for me at Hankow, and were given force and form, particularly, by Michael Borodin and Rayna Prohme.

II

But before I went up the river to Hankow I had to make the acquaintance of the parts of the Chinese revolutionary movement that had already begun to be corrupted by power—the counter-revolutionary group of Shanghai and Nanking. Its position was interesting and typical; some such position is always assumed by middle-class revolutionaries at the moment of triumph, and Chiang Kai-shek, the shrewd young man, was even then engaged in the Kerensky-like manœuvres that were to make him President (so to speak) of China.

It might be useful to recall, just here, what the course of the Chinese national revolution had been up to 1927. It was a long, slow, cumulative movement, the awakening of a giant; it had been going on for thirty-odd years. Its original organisation was the work of the great revolutionary Sun Yat-sen, whose power to move and convince throngs of people had made him the natural leader of the whole South, and, for a time, of all China. In 1911, with the overthrow

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of the Manchu dynasty, Sun Yat-sen had been proclaimed President of China at Nanking, but, robbed of the actual power by the clever reactionary, Yuan Shih-kai, had retired to Canton to establish there the central point, the focus, for all revolutionary activity. Even in Canton Sun Yat-sen's career was chequered; he was always being driven out and returning in triumph.

In 1923, pursuing their announced policy of friendliness to all Asiatic national movements, the Bolsheviks (through Joffe, their ambassador at Peking) made an agreement with Sun Yat-sen by which they were to supply him with military and political advisers, money and munitions. From this point onward the development of the Cantonese revolutionary movement was rapid and overwhelmingly successful. The Bolsheviks had given Sun Yat-sen what he needed, an army. They also moulded, to some extent, the ideas of the movement, although Sun Yat-sen himself never became a Communist, and always, apparently, believed that it would be possible for China to assume the forms of an organised industrial society without going through any kind of class warfare. Sun Yat-sen himself died in 1924, but the movement, becoming increasingly social and economic, with an intensive labour propaganda, became harder to resist after his death than it had been before. The various war lords who governed China on the feudal system dreaded it, and with reason, for it was by its nature inimical to them even when it made use of their services.

Finally, in 1927, the armies of Canton had swept all the way up to the Yangtze-kiang, had taken Hankow, Shanghai, and Nanking, and with them the revenues of the richest part of China. The capture of Nanking, about two weeks before I arrived in Shanghai, had been marked by a collapse of discipline; certain of the Cantonese troops had run wild in

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the city, looting, raping, and killing. These incidents—"the Nanking outrages"—had been promptly avenged by an Anglo-American bombardment of the city, in which numerous non-combatants were killed. Anti-foreign feeling, always strong among the Chinese revolutionaries, was at a very high pitch indeed, and all foreigners had been ordered (by their own governments) to leave the interior of China and concentrate at Shanghai and Tientsin. The Cantonese movement had, practically speaking, won its victory, for it was only a question of time until the remaining war lords (the chief of whom was old Chang Tso-lin, supported by the Japanese) would be swept out of the way by the better trained and equipped soldiers, and by the enormously persuasive propaganda, from the South.

This moment of triumph was inevitably the one in which the two elements among the Cantonese victors would separate. Genuine revolutionaries—those who wished to change the conditions of life in China, and not simply the forms or names of government—found themselves obliged to cling to the Left Wing of the Kuomintang, in which Russian influence was paramount. The others—those who took part in the revolution for their own advantage, or were prevented by the tenacity of middle-class ideas from wishing to disturb the established arrangement of wealth—collected around the treasuries of Shanghai and Nanking, under the patronage of the Chinese bankers of those cities and their new ally, Chiang Kai-shek. The Left Wing had its capital at Hankow, and the Right Wing at Nanking. The division was not yet open and public, and the Kuomintang (People's Party—Sun Yat-sen's old organisation) kept up a pretence of unity for some time, but the opposition of the two tendencies was too glaring to be denied in private talk, and constituted, in fact, the chief immediate problem of the revolution.

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I went, first, to see Mr. T. V. Soong. He was a young man of about my own age, trained at Harvard, intelligent, competent, and honest, and had been Minister of Finance for the Cantonese government. The same post had been assigned to him at Hankow and also at Nanking, but at the precise moment of my arrival he had resigned it. He continued resigning it for years, only to take it up again, until he was to become a kind of permanent Minister of Finance in all the Kuomintang governments. His usefulness came not only from the confidence inspired by his known capacity and honesty, but from his relationship to the semi-divine figure of Sun Yat-sen: he was a brother of the great man's widow. When I arrived in Shanghai he was living in Sun Yat-sen's house in the French Concession, the house given the old hero by the city for a permanent refuge in his turbulent career.

Mr. Soong—"T. V.," as he was always called—received me well. He spent some time explaining to me the difficulties of his own position, a problem that always worried him a good deal. As I came to know T. V. rather better in the following months, I grew to regard him as the most typical Liberal I had ever known—honest, worried, puzzled, unable to make up his mind between the horrors of capitalist imperialism and the horrors of Communist revolution. If China had only been America, his happiness would have been complete, for he could have pretended not to know about the horrors. But in China it was impossible to step out of doors without seeing evidence, on every hand, of the brutal and inhuman exploitation of human labour by both Chinese and foreigners. T. V. was too sensitive and too idealistic not to be profoundly moved by such spectacles. And yet he had an equally nervous dread of any genuine kind of revolution; crowds frightened him, labour agitation and

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strikes made him physically ill, and the idea that the rich might ever be despoiled filled him with alarm. During a demonstration in Hankow one day his motor car was engulfed by a mob and one of its windows was broken. He was, of course, promptly rescued by his guards and removed to safety, but the experience had a permanent effect on him—gave him the nervous dislike for mass action that controlled most of his political career and threw him at last, in spite of the sincerity of his idealism, into the camp of the reactionaries. He was an amiable, cultivated, and charming young man, but he had no fitness for an important rôle in a great revolution. On the whole, I believe he realised it perfectly, and was made more miserable by that fact than by any other.

III

Hankow, Wuchang, Hanyang, the three great cities called, together, Wuhan, blackened the flat shores of the river early on the fifth day of my journey from Shanghai. Of the three cities, Hankow was the most important, although not the largest. It was the one in which the foreigners had built their own city, in concessions taken from the Chinese in the nineteenth century. The Germans, Russians, and Americans having been counted out for assorted reasons, the foreign city consisted, in 1927, of the British, French, and Japanese Concessions—or, practically, of the first two, since the Japanese Concession was almost indistinguishable from the surrounding Chinese town. Foreign women and children had left Hankow when the Cantonese captured the city the preceding winter; many of the men had followed them; the city was consequently regarded as “evacuated,” although a handful of Americans, British, and French remained in charge of their various properties, and the British and

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American navies, represented in great strength at Hankow, filled the town from morning to night with sailors on leave and the naval police sent out to guard them.

My first interviews were with Borodin and Chen, whose names were best known in the world at large as representatives of the point of view of Hankow, of the Left Kuomintang. Borodin had never sought public attention and disliked giving interviews, but by this time it was no longer possible for him to avoid them. Eugene Chen loved public attention as a cat loves milk, and was at his best in an interview, rolling forth his grand, oratorical sentences with long pauses so that they might be written down in detail. Both Borodin and Chen used English, not only with representatives of the press, but in their communications with each other and with most of the other members of the Hankow government, for neither had a good command of Chinese. Chen was Foreign Minister, the spokesman for all his colleagues, and so could freely exercise his gifts as a proclamation-monger. Borodin, chief of the Russian advisers, tried to avoid speaking for the Hankow government, and restricted himself as much as he could, with interviewers whom he did not know, to discussions of principle.

My first impressions of both Borodin and Chen were overlaid by a mass of later impressions, by a whole tangle of experience in China and Russia in which they figured, and yet that first view of them in Hankow still seems to me clear and substantially correct. Borodin, a large, calm man with the natural dignity of a lion or a panther, had that special quality of being in, but above, the battle, that seems to me to deserve, in itself and without regard to the judgment of the world, the name of greatness. His slow, resolute way of talking, his refusal to be hurried or to get excited, his insistence upon the fundamental lines of action that determined detailed

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events, gave a spacious and deliberate character to his conversation, lifting it far above the shallowness of journalism and the hysteria of politics. He seemed to take "the long view" by nature, by an almost physical superiority of vision.

As I knew him better I perceived—or, rather, he showed me—how his political philosophy made breadth and elevation inevitable in the mind that understood it. He was an Old Bolshevik; that is, he had been a member of the Leninist school since its underground days before the war. His exile had been spent in the United States, where he acquired a better immediate knowledge of the industrial system than was common among Bolshevik intellectuals. He had returned to Russia in 1917, to "party work," and had been entrusted with the Chinese mission in 1923. His whole adult life had been spent in the service of a system of thought in which the immediate event was regarded as meaningless unless related to other events on both sides in point of time; in which the individual was valued by his relationship to his fellow beings; in which the most important of processes was held to be the comprehension, however disagreeable, of cause and effect. Such ways of thinking were required by the Bolshevik system, and the mind exercised in them through years of activity had no time or room for egotism, pettiness, fussiness, immediate hysteria. If one disregarded the economic structure (Marxian economics) with which the Bolshevik mind was preoccupied, it could be seen that the method of thought in itself was "good"—produced, as in the case of Borodin, a clear, calm, and comprehensive view of life.

Borodin himself would have attributed the quality I have called greatness (the quality of being in, but above, the battle) to the political philosophy and to nothing else. He would have said that the philosophy gave "historical perspective," and that historical perspective, once thoroughly understood,

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enabled the mind to inhabit a clearer air. But as, during the succeeding months, I came to know a number of other Communists more or less well, I was obliged to conclude that this was not so. However adequately they may have learned their political philosophy, it did not always lift them above the mud in which we flounder; a Communist could be just as stupid, petty, and egotistical as any bourgeois. Borodin would have said that such a Communist was not a good Communist—which, although probably true, demolished the idea that an acquired political philosophy was alone enough to raise human beings to the highest power of which they were capable in the sense of life. The political philosophy had to be thoroughly understood, articulated, and applied, made into a constant medium in which the good Communist could live as the saints lived in God, as the fish live in the sea. Something like this must have happened before "the long view" and the reasoned plan of existence came to be Borodin's native element, from which he could look calmly upon the chaos of immediate events; but since it worked for him and not for others, there must also have been in his nature, from the beginning, an aptitude for reflection, a capacity for detached thought, superior to the aptitudes and capacities of other men who professed the same beliefs without thereby coming a shade nearer the stars.

IV

The door at the end of the darkened reception room on the second floor of the Ministry of Finance opened, and in came a small, shy Chinese lady in a black silk dress. In one of her delicate, nervous hands she held a lace handkerchief, in the other my note of introduction from T. V. Soong, given me in Shanghai. When she spoke, her voice almost made me jump, it was so soft, so gentle, so unexpectedly

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sweet. The shutters had been closed to keep out the heat, and I could not see her until she had come quite near me. Then, looking down in bewilderment, I wondered who on earth she could be. Did Madame Sun Yat-sen have a daughter of whom I had never heard? It honestly did not occur to me that this exquisite apparition, so fragile and timorous, could be the actual lady herself, the most celebrated woman revolutionary in the world.

"You saw my brother in Shanghai," she said hesitantly. "Tell me, how is he?"

It was Madame Sun.

For a good ten minutes we were at sea. She struggled to overcome her own timidity with but little help from my side, for I was experiencing the complicated disorders described in the fine cockney phrase "struck all of a heap." I was "struck all of a heap" by Madame Sun, a heap compounded of many things: her loveliness, her gentleness, the shy purity of her voice and eyes; my own incompetence and clumsiness; and, perhaps the most confusing of all, the utter unexpectedness of the event. I had heard an enormous number of things about her, most of them lies. The American newspapers had surpassed themselves on the subject. According to them, Madame Sun was "China's Joan of Arc"; she was the leader of a Chinese "woman's battalion"; she was this, that, and the other thing, depending on the fantasies of the headline writers. The notion that she had actually led troops in battle was so widespread that even in China some of the foreigners believed it. In Shanghai this grotesque legend was complicated by more offensive lies, in which her personal character and motives were attacked—a favourite method of political argument in the treaty ports. Although I had sense enough not to believe most of the stories about her, they must have made, collectively, some kind of

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impression, for I had certainly expected to meet something formidable. And instead, here I was face to face with a childlike figure of the most enchanting delicacy, only too plainly trembling with terror at the sight of me. Never had I felt so big and clumsy, so hopelessly barbarian.

But Madame Sun was aided by a number of characteristics that always enabled her, with an effort, to conquer her own timorousness—not only with me, that is, but in the general conduct of life. She had endless reserves of dignity, a dignity so natural and certain that it deserved the name of stateliness. The same quality can occasionally be observed in royal princes or princesses of Europe, especially in the older ones; but with them it is a clear result of lifelong training. Madame Sun's stateliness was of a different, a more intrinsic quality; it came, so to speak, from the inside out, instead of being put on like a harness. She also possessed moral courage to a rare degree, which could keep her steadfast and unflinching in the presence of any grave peril. Her loyalty to the name of Sun Yat-sen, to the duty she felt she owed it, was able to withstand trials without end. These qualities—dignity, loyalty, moral courage—gave her character an underlying strength that could, at times, overcome the impressions of fragility and shyness created by her physical appearance, and endow her figure with the sternest aspect of heroism. Death itself could not intimidate her; poverty and exile, the fury of her own family and the calumnies of the world, were unable to bend her inflexible will toward courses she felt to be wrong. She was, in a truer sense than the merely physical one intended by the headline writers, "China's Joan of Arc," but you had to know her for a good while before you realised the power of the spirit beneath that exquisite tremulous envelope.

Madame Sun was born Rosalind Soong (Soong Ching-

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ling), of a family of rich Shanghai merchants. The Soongs belonged to the very comprador class attacked by the Chinese Revolution—the class that had grown rich in traffic with the foreigners, and had strong economic interests in the maintenance of the old régime. Soong Ching-ling was educated in the United States (in Wesleyan College, at Macon, Georgia) and returned to China when she was nineteen. It was then that the Tsung Li met, fell in love with, and married her. He was a great deal older than she was, but he had all the magic of a name that had already assumed symbolic significance in China; and whatever his other qualities may have been, Sun Yat-sen must have possessed a rare and wonderful power of personal influence. Few men in history have had his gift of commanding devotion. In his long, adventurous life, which reads like the invention of a romantic writer, he was constantly being saved from death or disaster by the extraordinary fidelity of his friends. The last of his faithful followers was his second wife, his present widow, who was to carry her loyalty to his person and his ideals (quixotically, perhaps) far beyond the grave.

Madame Sun's friends used sometimes to discuss a question suggested by the contrast between her natural shyness, her love of privacy, and the public rôle she was obliged to play. It was this: what might have been the development of her life if she had never met Sun Yat-sen? A theory advanced was that, left to herself, she would have married "well" and spent her time in all the private dignity and family self-sufficiency of a rich Chinese lady in Shanghai. It is possible. But no character can be studied in this way after the events that shaped it have taken their place in the ordered memory of the past. A fusion has occurred; single strands of character no longer mean anything; the nexus alone can be made to yield some of the secrets of a human personality.

The nexus in this case was the marriage, which subjected Soong Ching-ling in her first youth to the most powerful influence of revolutionary idealism China has ever known. She travelled with Sun Yat-sen, acted as his secretary, participated with him in mass meetings and party councils, public triumphs and secret flights. She learned to share his passionate indignation at injustice of every kind, his determination to organise and prolong the revolt of the masses until the whole country had been brought under a national party dictatorship for the three objectives of his revolution—the San Min Chu I : Democracy, Nationalism, Social Welfare.

These experiences, these ideas, transformed the shy young girl, the possible fine lady, into a woman with a character of tempered steel. When Sun Yat-sen died she took her place in the Central Executive Committee and the other governing bodies of the Kuomintang, and in spite of her dislike for debate, public speaking, or public appearances, she performed her duties to the party without complaint. At the time of my arrival in China, in the open schism in the party, she had already resolutely taken her place with the faction of the Left Kuomintang and its Communist minority.

That was Madame Sun when I first saw her. The tragic events of the following months, the massacre of the Communists, the crushing of the labour movement in blood, were to arouse her indignation to such a pitch that she seemed, almost before one's eyes, to take on stature. Without physical or intellectual power, by sheer force of character, purity of motive, sovereign and consistent honesty, she became heroic. In the clamorous wreck and ruin of the Chinese Revolution, this phenomenon was one of the most extraordinary : generals and orators fell to pieces, yielded, fled, or were silent, but the one revolutionary who could not be crushed and would not be still was the fragile little

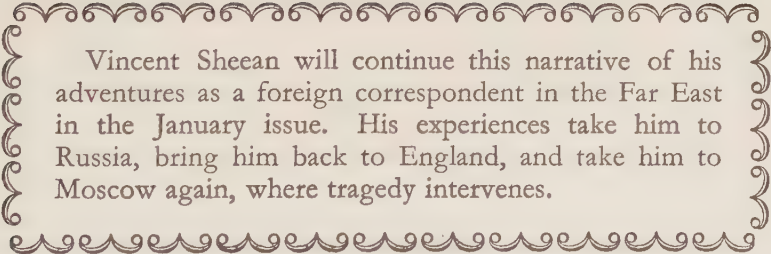
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widow of Sun Yat-sen. A "doll," they used to call her sometimes in the treaty ports. The world would be a less painful object of contemplation if it contained a few more such "dolls."

So I thought then, as now I think.

And still I had not yet seen Rayna Prohme.

(To be continued.)



Vincent Sheean will continue this narrative of his adventures as a foreign correspondent in the Far East in the January issue. His experiences take him to Russia, bring him back to England, and take him to Moscow again, where tragedy intervenes.

Lili Died in April

I WAS fifteen on a Monday, and on Saturday Lili died. I have been told much about her death and what I should have felt at the time, but that is not what I really felt. This whole year they have talked about Lili's death, and it has grown very big. And she, too, has grown huge—quite other than she was—because of all that they have told about her. But her death wasn't big and dark, as they said. It was altogether different. Sometimes I wouldn't have known that they were talking of my own sister if they hadn't mentioned her name—Lili.

Lili was beautiful, it is true, but she was uncontrolled and often wicked; so, though it was right that they should say how very beautiful she was, they shouldn't have said all that about her sweet and generous nature. If anything, she was mean. Perhaps Mother didn't understand that; but my room was next to Lili's and Julia's room, and I remember how she locked away all her things from Julia, and how she used to hit Julia on the head with her hair-brush if she found any dark hairs on it. For her own were bright gold, and they never broke or came off. The brush went clear through, leaving them smooth and shiny. That's what

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they all said about her in her coffin—that she had such shiny hair.

Then about her being sweet-tempered. That's just silly! Mother knows very well how she slammed the door so that the whole house shook, after I had said I wouldn't fasten her bracelet for her that night when she went out and was brought back dead.

It was Saturday, and Lili was going to a ball, but the rest of us were staying at home. Mother seldom went out, because it cost a lot, with clothes and taxis and things; and, besides, Mother was not strong and she wanted a quiet life. Julia, I think, would have liked to go out more than she did, only our place was too small to have a lot of friends, and if one didn't ask them, they didn't ask you. So that's why Julia didn't go out much. Of course it was different with Lili, because she was so terribly beautiful that no party was good without her; and then she was clever and funny too. They often asked her to dull dinners to cheer them up.

That night supper was hurried, as always when one of us sisters was going somewhere afterwards. I had wanted to take it easy, as I had no homework, and I knew that Julia also had that lazy Saturday feeling, though she was teaching school instead of attending one. From the very beginning I saw that it was going to be one of those slapdash meals that everybody hates except the person who is in a hurry. As a rule we met in the sitting-room and stood about, waiting for Mother to come, then walked in to dinner, Mother first, with her arm round Lili or sometimes me, while the other two would follow. But this evening she was in the dining-room and sitting down at table before anyone, and my hands weren't even dry, because I had hurried so.

Before the tray had arrived I already smelled the eternal smell of mackerel. The oftener Lili went out to parties, the

oftener we had mackerel. Mother ate quickly, with a hurried frown on her forehead, and it seemed to me that she swallowed many bones. In her blouse she had stuck some pins. She selected the nicest-looking fish and put it on Lili's plate, then covered it with a bread-plate.

Just then Lili's head and bare shoulders showed in the doorway leading to her room, and she called, "Mother, I scarcely want a thing—just a little soup or sweet or whatever there is!" and was gone again. A little later, when we had already started on the vanilla cream (and vanilla cream is frightfully dull and tasteless when one has had nothing more exciting than mackerel before), Lili came and sat down in her white wrapper and ate some spoonfuls of the cream, talking to Mother about her dress. Her hair was all over the wrapper, and it wasn't extraordinary that people gushed about it, for we ourselves always had to look at it when it hung loose like that, newly brushed.

She could scarcely have eaten anything, because she was off again in a moment, and Mother also rose, putting down her napkin unfolded. As she followed Lili from the room, she took the pins out of her blouse and put them in her mouth, so I knew she was going to help Lili dress.

It was then I began to feel so sad. I felt sadder that evening than I did the next day, though I know I shouldn't say it. For next day was all commotion, and this evening everything was vague and lonely.

Yes, it was April, and so the lamp wasn't lit, though it was seven o'clock. We never lit the lamp for dinner after my birthday, and that had been five days before. As Julia and I sat on by the table, the room got quite dark—only outside, above the backyard, the sky still showed white. Somebody was playing ball down there, and that sounded spring-like. I listened to the ball thud against the house

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wall and counted the thuds, but the player must have been a regular bungler—every time he reached twenty he messed it all up. I remembered how I had done a hundred the year before, with variations and all, only now Mother didn't want me to go down there any more.

I turned back to the room, and saw Julia hunched up in the dark. I couldn't see her eyes, that always were so sweet to look into. She was staring at her hands or at the tablecloth, but it was the way her head was bent that was so dreary. Though they didn't tell me, I knew that Julia was sorry to be always teaching school, instead of getting married and having a nice husband to comfort her. Maybe that was the reason she sat staring at her hands—because they were bare and had no ring on them. I thought of going over to her and standing by her chair and perhaps touching her; but then I knew they thought me too young to understand anything, just as they thought me too old to run down and play ball in the yard, so I stayed where I was. They always thought me one thing or another, always different from what I thought myself, and that's why later on they believed they knew what I felt about Lili's death.

We sat on by the table until it was almost dark. The cloth was all one could see, and some streaks in the dark sky—the houses opposite and even the walls of the room had sunk away. Against those light streaks the birch tree in the backyard began to swing its branches with their long, feathery hangings, and though they weren't yet green, they were nice with all their curly twigs.

Through the open windows of the building I heard the clatter of dinner-things being washed. It seemed spring-like, too, that one should be able to make out sounds so clearly. I could even hear the water in the dish-pan suck at each plate as it was taken out, and the thump of the plate

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being stuck into the rack! From other windows I heard voices go out in the dark—gently. Somehow I felt that they were saying sad things.

But the dark seemed darkest where Julia sat. I couldn't see her at all, though why shouldn't her pale face show up as well as the table-cloth? I knew that Julia loved me, so I can't think why I didn't go to her. If it had been Lili I would have gone, for Lili was quick and always understood; but Julia was all soft and sorrowing and thankful. I sat there feeling hard-hearted, though deep inside I knew it wasn't real hardness, only that I had no time for soft bonelessness then. I don't know how to say it. I was hurrying on to a new day, and she was content to stay on with the night in her sad, soft bonelessness. This April night was also hurrying on to a new April day. It was something like that I mean.

Suddenly Mother's and Lili's voices could be heard, their steps following each other across the hallway, and though it was so black now that neither of us could have seen if the other had made a sign, Julia and I rose at the same time and quickly left the room. Afterwards I felt it was a pity the only thought we had in common was that Lili should not see us sitting like that in the gloom.

I remember that I wanted to run back into the dining-room to have a look at Lili in all her glory. She was in white that evening, and she was grandest in white. I wanted to run back, but I was cross at everything—at having been cheated out of a good Saturday dinner, at not being able to run down and play ball, at sneaking out like that in the dark—so I didn't want her to think that she was anything so marvelous, and I lay down on the sofa in my room instead. I took up a book, but my thoughts kept wandering off to the others. Soon Mother would be going to bed, worn out

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from all her fussing and pinning, while Julia would be locked in her room, arranging and tidying her drawers or mooning by the window. Cheerful Saturday! When people say "that tragic evening" and "I suppose you will never forget that evening," I only remember the tasteless mackerel, the grit flying about in the backyard, Julia's dreariness and Mother's exhaustion.

The door was torn open—something warm and living stood by my sofa. I knew it was Lili, and that she wanted me to do something for her. If I had had the slightest doubt about that, if I had thought that she only came in to show herself, I am sure I wouldn't have behaved so rudely. Before she had as much as asked me, I said no to her outstretched wrist with the bracelet.

"No, you can fasten it yourself," I said.

It is only now, when I have heard so much about death and the last thing one said to her and the last things she said, that I pay any attention to the way I answered her. I still cannot see why the last thing is more important than all the things one has said and done to each other every day before, but they all seem to think so.

When I refused, she said nothing. She walked straight out without a good-night or anything, but I knew how furious she was, and that made up a little for my ruined evening.

As she went out, I turned my head to look at her. My room was dim, but I don't know how it is with Lili—was, I mean—she always seemed to catch all the light wherever she was standing. Her smooth gold hair was like the globe of a lamp lit up, though, even apart from that, she was all bright and shining.

A second later the hall door slammed to viciously, and the whole flat shuddered, then sank together with a sigh. All was dull.

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About ten o'clock I heard stirrings in Julia's room, but she didn't come in to me, and I knew that she wouldn't, for regularly every evening at ten she went to the kitchen, to make Mother's soup with malt and barley sugar. A quarter after ten we had to go in and wish Mother good-night, for sleep left her entirely if she did not get it the moment that her soup had made her hot and dozy.

I rose, feeling cramped, and yawning till my jaws ached, stumbled through the hallway into Mother's room. In there it was already hushed and night-like. The small lamp glowed softly, and in the half-darkness where the light did not reach, Mother leant on her pillow sipping the creamy soup. I kissed her with stiff, sleepy lips. She passed her hand over my hair and said, "See you in the morning, dear!" But it was long before morning that she saw me.

I was dreaming that layers and layers of cloth were wrapped around me, choking me, and that I had to get out to answer the ringing of a door-bell. I woke up and heard the shrill sound of the telephone in the dark. Even in my room, through closed doors, it sounded dreadful. I was up and out of bed, thinking that Mother would never get to sleep again after waking up so suddenly. In the dark hallway I bumped right into Julia's body, all soft in her nightdress. She was holding the receiver and saying, "Yes? Yes?"—then very faintly—"Yes." Then she laid down the receiver and turned around. In the doorway stood Mother. The light from her little lamp fell into the hall.

"Is Lili dead?" she said.

"Yes," Julia answered.

That was one thing they never told afterwards—that Mother had known, although Julia had only kept repeating "Yes—yes." And also that Julia did not try to break it more gently to Mother, knowing how frail Mother was.

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It was nice that they were like that and talked like that. I felt such terrible love for them both in that moment—for us all three.

The whole night we sat on Mother's bed. I got in with her and held her around her waist, and Julia sat on the edge of the bed close up by the pillows and held us both.

We stayed there a long time, for it was only just after one when the telephone rang. I don't remember much about how the night passed. For hours we sat without moving, holding each other hard. Towards dawn, Julia lay down on the bed and began to cry frightfully, but Mother never lay down once during all the hours of dark. Right up till morning she sat in the same way. I wonder if she even knew that she and I were holding each other and that she kept smoothing Julia's hands.

There was a great calm in Mother's room that night. When daybreak came, it seemed loud and disturbing. I remember I began kissing Mother as I had never kissed her before—her neck and her hair and her shoulders, and finally her mouth also. I wonder why I kissed her like that? Perhaps I needed to touch somebody after all the stillness, or else I wanted to feel that she at least was living and belonged to me. Or was it because I was sorry for her, who was so truly sad, while I was terribly sad, but not sad right through?

I almost hurt Mother, squeezing her so hard, but she seemed to understand, as she understood everything that night. That night she was different in every way. At last she closed her eyes and lay down very gently, as if afraid of breaking something, and she and Julia lay and held hands.

I walked over to the window. I had hardly ever been up so early before—I always slept on right till the alarm clock woke me in the morning. Now a new day was there, and

I thought of how the new day had hurried off the night so as to be able to begin. I looked at the tree in the yard, and now it wasn't sad, like last night, but fresh and gay. During the night it had rained, and at first I only noticed that the trunk was glistening wet. Then, though I couldn't believe it at first, I saw that the branches were light, light green, where they had been brown the night before. I'm not sure if it was that which made me so peculiarly glad, but somehow I was glad on the morning after Lili died.

As I stood looking out, I felt that hushed and darkened room behind me, and when I finally turned around, the bed with Mother and Julia seemed so weighed down with sorrow that I thought its four legs were slowly sinking in the floor. Mother's eyes, and Julia's, were closed—they looked ill. I went to the kitchen to make us some tea, and there by the stove sat the maid, weeping and moaning. I sat down on her lap and we wept terribly.

Then I wanted to tell her about the tree having become green, but I knew that I shouldn't. In those days I always had to remember the sort of things I shouldn't say. I thought that if Lili had been there, and somebody else in the family had died, I could have shown her the tree and she would have understood how gay it was, quite apart from our sorrow—no, not apart—somehow mixed up with it.

When I came back, Julia and I put Mother properly to bed with hot water-bottles, and we drew the blinds. Later, Julia stood telephoning in the sitting-room, with the wire stretched as far as it would go from the hallway, so that Mother shouldn't have to hear each time she said about Lili having died in the night and how it happened. It was terrible the way everybody wanted to know so exactly about that, and Julia had to tell them how Lili had gone out on a balcony between dances and had leaned against the wooden

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rail, and the rail must have been rotten, for it broke and Lili fell through. Julia had to say it over and over to different relatives and friends, explaining that Lili was dead when people rushed down to her—her neck was broken. She had to repeat twice, "Yes, broke her neck," when she told it to old Uncle John. Then she replaced the receiver without saying good-bye and she sat down and shook with sobs. So then I sat down and cried with her.

It was good it happened on a Saturday night, because it was Sunday now, and we could stay at home with no work to do. From time to time I went in to Mother, but I didn't like to sit on the bed after last night, so I sat on the straight-backed chair where she lays her clothes. Even there I couldn't stop myself from falling off to sleep. . . .

I awoke with a start. Julia was standing above me, dressed in the grey suit she wears for school, and her hair was neatly done. I thought that now she could use Lili's whalebone brush every day and get a little more shine on her hair, though perhaps I shouldn't have thought of that so soon after. I didn't remember about Lili being dead when I first woke up, but I immediately remembered about the brush when I saw Julia's dull-looking hair. She told me to go and dress, for I was still wearing the overcoat that I had thrown on above my nightdress the night before.

When I was dressed I sat in my room. There was nothing to do, and it was only nine o'clock. I thought I oughtn't to settle too comfortably, so I sat on the edge of my sofa, feeling only that I was dressed and that I had shoes on. Then I began to think of Mother—of what this meant to her, who was oldish and not really living like I was living—and to Julia, who was unhappy in life anyway, and so boneless. When I had seen the tree green in the early morning I had known that I wasn't sad in the same way as they, and

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I had understood that people were clogged up and somehow wrong to think that death is sad.

Suddenly I noticed how quiet the flat was, and remembered the way Lili's feet had run across the floors last night and made everything lively. I began to cry by myself, and that was much worse than crying with the others. I said her name out loud, "Lili, Lili, Lili!" I had to lie down on the sofa; it was so terrible when I said her name. I must have cried really loudly, for Julia came in to me.

"Listen, dear," she said. "Hurry down and get some flowers. They're bringing her home soon. We want some flowers to put beside her."

She got my coat for me; and helped me to put it on. We were very tender to each other that day and for a long time afterwards, and when she gave me the money she didn't say, "Be careful not to lose it."

Then I came out in the street. And about that part of my morning the others can say nothing, though for me it is closely bound up with Lili's death—I mean that everything was so fine and bright. It was the finest April morning I had ever seen—and I ought to know, for I always want the weather to be warm and nice for my birthday, and I remember from one year to the next exactly how it has been around that time.

Other people must also have been pleased, for lots of windows were open, and pink and blue eiderdowns and blankets were heaped on the window-sills. That looked pretty in the grey street—only it wasn't grey that morning, but white and shining, and sparrows were fighting and chirping for some tufts of straw. The sun burnt my cheeks—really burnt them. Maybe it felt so sharp because they were swollen and sore from weeping.

I went down the street. The air was nice on my bare

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hands. I walked slowly and looked closely at everything, as if I had been away and now was seeing it all again. I looked at the water rushing in the gutter, and saw a cork stuck behind a twig. I wanted to help it along, but then I remembered and glanced quickly around.

At the end of the street was the flower shop. Against the glistening window, masses of flowers were flattening their faces, and they were still brighter in colour than the blankets and the eiderdowns! The sun beat on the window and they stretched their stalks to reach it. Amongst them all I saw the white narcissi, and it was as if I had known they would be there. *They* were good, *they* were like the morning outside, and when the girl handed them to me they seemed to leap in my arms. I carried them out into the air with me, and there we stood still. I didn't know whether to go home or walk a little with them in the sunshine! But then I thought that Lili might be home by now and that I had better hurry.

Still more windows were open as I walked back, and white curtains were blowing out. I could hear someone playing a piano with one finger. The sparrows were all in a screeching, fluttering heap above the straw.

The street was long, with many side streets, and as I came to the one where our laundress lived, the sun went into a cloud. In one second that narrow street looked like a dark river, and an icy wind whipped at my legs. Then, for the first time, all was terrible. I stood close to a house wall, while the wind banged up and down the street, and I thought of Lili and of how we'd soon be riding behind her hearse in black heavy clothes. The wind snatched at my flowers and made them shudder. I began to run towards home.

Going up the stairs, I met a messenger boy with his cap

pulled over one eye, and there on the hall table lay telegrams, beside bouquets in stiff white bags. They looked like big heavy heads tied up in paper.

As I was putting my flowers in water to keep fresh till they were needed, the flat was filled with sounds. Steps came closer, closer. Never have I heard such slow and dreadful steps. In the sitting-room they stopped, and I could make out the sounds of something bulky being lowered. I went wild with fright. I looked at my flowers in the basin, had only one wish—to run away—and leaned forward to snatch them from the water. Out of these rooms! Not near to *that* should they go!

As I lifted them up, there was a gleam on the water as if a shimmering fish had swum through it—the next moment the basin was filled with sunlight right to the brim! It came so suddenly that I felt dazed, and then, as I stood there in the brightness, I understood that it really was our Lili who was in the sitting-room. When I looked into the basin I saw her golden hair dancing on the water. I dipped down my hand to fondle it.

And now I only longed to go to her with my flowers. I lifted them high in the air, and from their green stalks drops fell into the water, making tiny rings. I pressed them to my face and wondered what I should say when I gave them to Lili.

*Berenice's Curl*¹

NOTHING may be considered insignificant in a woman's appearance, least of all her coiffure, from the alterations of which diverse conclusions may be drawn as to what is taking place in a feminine head. They knew that two thousand years ago at the court of Ptolemy in Egypt; Berenice's Curl, a constellation familiar to every astronomer, provides irrefutable proof of that.

Berenice was the only daughter of King Magas of Cyrene, the little neighbouring state to the mighty realm of the Ptolemys. Brought up motherless, in a bare, widowed house brooding sleepily in the sun, she was betrothed at the age of twelve to the royal heir at Alexandria, Prince Ptolemy, only a few years older than herself. But the Prince, more concerned with Berenice's inheritance than with the girl herself, did not travel to visit her, preferring to send his ambassador, Callimachos, who addressed her before the assembled court in Greek verse, flattering her ears and paternally kissing her forehead when the King had formally laid their hands together.

After which, Berenice's Egyptian nurse, a shrivelled old woman, smoothed back a recalcitrant lock of hair from the

¹ Translated from the German by Ralph N. Thompson.

Princess's forehead. The lock had fallen loose at Callimachos's touch. Berenice, however, did not wish to have the memory of this betrothal kiss removed, and also desired to annoy the nurse, whom, in common with all things Egyptian, she could not bear. So she defiantly drew the curl on to her forehead again. And there it remained, no matter what the King, Berenice's step-mother, or her unfortunate nurse might say. The slender child made her usual excuses, and indeed on the crown of her head her copper-coloured hair did run into a luxuriant confusion which could never be kept smooth. And from this riot of hair the curl had originated.

In time the stray lock actually became a proper curl, that by its very unexpectedness made her beautiful, perfectly symmetrical and finely moulded face strangely attractive.

When she reached seventeen, Berenice married Prince Ptolemy. This surprised her, for her step-mother, despite the celebrated engagement, had begun to contemplate a different marriage for Berenice. To this very end, her Syrian countryman, Prince Demetrios, had come to the court. Unfortunately, Demetrios, instead of being impressed by the daughter, conceived a furious and illicit passion for her step-mother. And one evening on Berenice's entering the Queen's room unannounced she found the Queen in the guest's arms.

That same night the ignominiously betrayed King succumbed in a fit of apoplexy. The guilty couple also mysteriously perished, with the result that the following morning the city raged, threatening the doors of the palace. Berenice, however, grave and proud, stepped out before her people and placed the crown of Cyrene upon her head with her own hands. The gesture found approval: the crowd cheered the lovely maid, and the small gold crown encircling her gold hair at the temples pressed the fateful curl firmer upon her brows. Gold laid upon gold, it appeared as though a golden cross

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had suddenly been set over her night-blue eyes and on her milk-white forehead.

It was then, for the first time, that the Egyptian capital began talking of the King's betrothal, esteeming Berenice responsible—and not unjustly—for the precipitate decease of her step-mother and the unprincipled Demetrios. Ptolemy arranged the wedding, which took place in Alexandria amid fabulous pomp. Two snow-white elephants bore the splendid couple in a purple pavilion to the citadel. The gilt reins were held on the right by Agesilaos, Captain of the royal household and commander of the young King's bodyguard, while on Berenice's side walked the ambassador, Callimachos. Before them, in a gold chariot drawn by six gilded horses, went the oldest of the court, Konon, high-priest and astrologer to the royal family for over fifty years.

The wedding procession blinded even the sated eyes of Alexandria. A glittering serpent of colour from which still more dazzling cavalcades kept emerging gave the crowd's astonishment no rest. Together with the wedding guests in gorgeous costume came governors from every quarter of the realm, then came foreign ambassadors clad in their jewelled armour, and also all the latest miracles of mechanical art, so that the eyes were tired and wearied.

The greatest excitement was created by a very beautiful woman, eleven feet high. Gliding along on a canopy of concealed clock-work, she poured at regular intervals from her tower-like seat first milk, then wine, upon the yelling people from a pitcher perpetually refilled in some magic fashion. The mob screamed delightedly, but the shouts of joy yielded to shouts of fear mingled with roars from the throats of wild beasts. Lions, tigers, and panthers, a whole collection, caught in nets, enchained and yoked, struggled past the milk-and-wine-besplashed spectators. Flute players

and acrobatic dancers gambolled round these beasts. One of the dancing-girls approached too near, and was instantly torn to pieces. Another was attacked by a lion, and mangled beyond description. Again the people shouted with joy, only quietening down as a wood of uprooted trees complete with waving branches became visible in the procession. The silence spread. Birds sang. Secured by bright threads, the feathered singers darted up towards the glowing blue sky. At the sight of this singing wood even the beggars of Alexandria dropped their alms and clapped with empty hands.

All that Berenice, totally unmoved, saw from under her swaying purple awning. Her Grecian spirit sensed the barbaric ostentation, and rebelled against the despotic lack of taste of a country which turned men into automatons and automatons into men. At the banquet she felt happier when the handsomely built Callimachos read aloud his epithalamium.

"I will have the comb from which this honey has flowed!" she exclaimed in Greek, reaching out for the sheets of papyrus from which the poet had read.

"Callimachos will bring it to you," said Ptolemy, who, small and upright, sat at her side like a Pharaoh.

"Yes, to-morrow!" she cried. And quite thoughtlessly: "To-morrow, early in the morning."

The King upset the chalice of wine before him. He was angered that his bride should have forgotten her wedding night.

Yet was it a wedding night? The court ladies, who for the next few days debated this question with befitting thoroughness, doubted, and their doubts were not based upon surmise, but upon facts.

Soon after the distressing incident at the banquet, Berenice had risen and retired to her sleeping-apartments, the young King soon following with none too steady a step. Hardly

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had he entered Berenice's room before the ladies in attendance heard a peculiar cry. At the same moment they beheld Ptolemy, his face furious, shoulder his way through the curtain across the portal. He was clasping his right hand, pinching tightly a wound that bled.

The city declared that the moment the King had approached Berenice's couch he had been attacked by a young panther. The evil creature, broken free from the bridal procession, had slunk through a palm grove into the room leading on to the gardens, and later, when disturbed, had escaped the same way, for, on the servants hurrying in, no trace of the beast had been discovered.

The morning after this terrible occurrence, Berenice received Callimachos, as though nothing had happened. It was then generally noticed that she again had her hair in the style she had worn it when a girl in Cyrene. Only during the wedding ceremony had she hidden the curl beneath the ancient, blue, bucket-shaped "Queen's Crown." Now the curl straggled, a little golden snake, across her clear forehead, which, softly curved, was a fraction higher than Aphrodite's, though not less beautiful.

What might this caprice signify? The court ladies who were appointed to bear the Queen's crown back to its age-honoured sanctuary, dutifully puzzled their brains over the riddle.

Nor in the subsequent months did Berenice change the mode of her coiffure, despite the scarcely concealed displeasure of her royal consort.

"Either I or the curl!" he should have insisted.

And although what this lock of hair had to do with his wedding night was not exactly clear, since then Ptolemy had not entered Berenice's apartments.

The courtiers murmured this and that. Some, for instance

Agesilaos, said Ptolemy should, enforcing his rights as a husband, remove the offending curl by force, and, if necessary, by the sword. Others, guided by the wise Konon, who in his black basalt observatory at the far end of the royal gardens interpreted the course of the stars and expounded the oracle, avowed tact would be more effective.

Berenice, meanwhile, had conceived an aversion to this sinister land, where they prayed to cats and animals' visages, and, when one was enjoying oneself, carried a corpse round the table. The Greek girl's aversion found expression in her singular coiffure as well as in the marked favouring of her compatriot Callimachos. The wise Konon advised the King to make a journey by sea with Berenice to Greece; under the Grecian skies, in the eternal spring of Berenice's Hellenic home, all would come right, and their country would have the mother it so urgently needed.

While the King wavered as to what he should do, and did nothing, war broke out in Syria. He at once ceased to waver, placed himself at the head of an army and marched away to fight. He was a Ptolemy. Berenice, though, he left in Alexandria.

Callimachos also remained in the capital, at the request of the young Queen, who did not wish to dispense with her lector. Frowning, the King granted her request, at the same time deciding to give Callimachos a warning, which he did after the manner of an Eastern potentate. On the day of the King's departure Berenice's favourite received two letters in quick succession. In the first, which came into his hands as if by error, he was addressed as "Agesilaos" and commanded to remove "C" if ever he should be "suspected"—the fatal word being written in Greek—at the Court. The second letter arrived half-an-hour later; in the haste of departure the King's notary had sent him the wrong letter, the messenger

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breathlessly explained. . . . Through the second letter Callimachos received an appointment by royal favour as Court Grammarian and Lector to the Queen. That same day he commenced his offices, a slight shiver running down his back.

This shivering increased when, on the way to the Queen, in the inner courtyard he encountered the captain of the royal bodyguard, Agesilaos, who, as Callimachos passed him, distinctly crackled a sheet of papyrus. But though Callimachos could well imagine what that document contained, and Agesilaos had no doubt as to where the other's footsteps were bent, the two greeted one another with that customary politeness of courts which does not, all the same, debar a murder.

Callimachos was forty, having no inclination for death. He wrote verses, sometimes good, often not so good, and to any other diversion which knocked at his door he was, on principle, not at home. With regard to love, the experienced man had long recognised that it is a lovely flower which dies when plucked, and the scent of the flower seemed to him the sweetest part.

Every day he came to Berenice at the appointed hour to expound Homer, or, wandering through the gardens, to explain the basis of Plato's philosophy, in which the Queen averred a keen interest.

If they approached the palace from the gardens, they would pass a splashing fountain, round which the court ladies used to sit whispering together in the evening coolness. If, on the other hand, they strayed away into the outer gardens, they would invariably meet Agesilaos, who would be parading up and down the dark alleys like a sentry, and who always crackled papyrus as they passed. And so their conversations never ran smoothly, while this kind of peripatetic tuition did

not appear to wholly please Berenice, who pondered deeply as to how the procedure could be most suitably altered, for she really wished to learn about Plato.

Hours long she sat before her oval mirror of polished metal, contemplating the curl upon her forehead and brooding over something which would lead her whither she knew not. But can she be blamed if her fate, like her hair, despotically took its own curved course? Why, too, had not Ptolemy visited her himself when they had been betrothed six years ago? Why had he sent Callimachos instead, and thus compelled her, whenever she wished to think of him, to think of another whose image obscured his? Why had her royal husband not wooed her more tenderly? Why had he, reeking of wine fumes, tried to draw her to him like a master—like one would possess a slave, but not, she thought, a Queen? Now in Syria he hurried from victory to victory, and with each victory he rose in her esteem. Yet was it too late? Syria was far; the enchanting garden lay at her feet.

Berenice prolonged the hours of tuition. She postponed them more and more towards the evening, the advancing summer affording her an excellent excuse. For this part of the day reserved for her favourite she dressed with particular beauty and fragrance. She besprinkled herself with sweet-scented waters, she wrapped her arms and shoulders in diaphanous veils. She polished her finger-nails. She moved the curl this way and that. She twisted it round her forefinger for hours. She crimped it with heated tongs. And all that to convey to her friend a little of what troubled her heart, to inspire the teacher to be less reserved. But the friend did not understand, and the teacher had poor perceptive faculties. The one man in Alexandria, he did not appear to notice once that Berenice wore her hair differently from other women in Egypt.

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The Syrian campaign dragged on, and Berenice proceeded from mild methods of coquetry to more intimate ones.

One day she received her mentor with downcast face. Straightforwardly questioned, she declared she had wanted to cancel the lesson because she felt disfigured by a blister on her upper lip which invariably appeared when a desire went unfulfilled. Callimachos, however, could not discover the blister, although he had tolerably good eyes—nor the desire.

On another occasion she sent him word that she would not expect him in the Palace but on the strand near the isolated observatory of the wise Konon. Presently she came, dismissed her attendants, and confided to Callimachos the ostensible reason for her order; the new Carthaginian ambassador would have visited her that afternoon; she had alleged an excursion on the sea so as to contrive a meeting with Callimachos, and she must not be seen within the palace precincts before nightfall. The ambassador from Carthage was both sensitive and malicious. Should it occur to him to inform Ptolemy of her excuse . . .

Callimachos, instead of replying, produced Homer and hastily began reading. He read the song of Odysseus and Nausica from the *Odyssey*.

"How well I can understand this young girl," murmured the lovely Berenice. "I, too, have always found only older men interesting."

They sat on a rock separated from the shore by a strip of shallow water, and the rock was so small that both of them could scarcely find room to sit down. After a while Callimachos rose and continued to read standing.

The spot pleased Berenice, and they often came again. Once when they had left the lonely rock so late that the first stars glittered over their heads, Berenice expressed a wish to

visit the old Konon in his basalt tower, and immediately made arrangements for a visit the following evening.

When, considerably later, they arrived at the palace, awaited by torch-bearers, Agesilaos was leaning against a half-illuminated column, crackling his papyrus very obviously. That, however, was not what Callimachos had to fear, but a report from the army in Syria.

"The King stands before the doors of Babylon," said Agesilaos in an almost threatening tone to Berenice.

"The Gods be praised!" she answered without stopping.

On the next day they made the preconcerted nocturnal visit to Konon. In vain the old man of prophecies assured the Queen that there was nothing to be seen in his observatory except stars.

"Those are just what I wish to see," replied Berenice obstinately.

"May the King soon return," sighed the elderly court ladies round the fountain. "If he goes on conquering much longer . . ."

Within the observatory pitch blackness prevailed. The circular room in the tower had four narrow windows through which stars twinkled at the four points of the compass. In the centre of the little chamber stood a round stone table upon which Konon had set some roses and light refreshment. The glimmer of a tiny earthenware lamp faintly lit this table.

Night after night Berenice and Callimachos sat at that table. The wise Konon was engaged in charting a new constellation; the eight hundred and forty-seventh in his catalogue. And every evening he made the same pretext to leave the couple alone.

One night the lamp between them failed. Callimachos was about to jump up and summon an attendant to rekindle the

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light when a soft, warm hand out of the dark covered his lips and stifled his call. He grasped the hand, caught the arm, reached for the neck and pressed a kiss upon the curl.

"Beautiful curl," he whispered, then stood silent.

But Berenice understood what his lack of eloquence signified.

"You shall have it, my Callimachos!" she breathed, lying enraptured in his arms.

A star's light slanted down into the room dark as the night. Berenice rose and walked towards a window: Venus shone above her head.

Then Konon, his little earthenware lamp in hand, descended hastily from his observatory.

"The King returns!" he called, half-way down.

"How do you know?" asked Berenice.

"The stars," answered Konon, raising his little lamp upwards.

The next morning Ptolemy entered Alexandria amid the blare of tubas and the clash of cymbals. And the first thing the conqueror of Asia asked, as Berenice, blushing red in the dawn, met him on the steps of the palace, was: "Where is your curl?"

That which before had been a source of irritation, he was now suddenly irritated to miss from the beloved forehead.

Berenice had had time to prepare an answer.

"It is in the Pantheon," she replied boldly. "In the event of your victorious return I vowed to sacrifice it to the Gods." And daintily she offered him the cup of welcome.

The King, although thirsty, merely sipped at the gold-and-jewel-encrusted chalice. Setting it down, he called in a voice that echoed victory:

"Agésilao!"

Agésilao stepped from the entourage, passing close by

Callimachos, who stood behind the Queen, and who once more distinctly heard the crackle of papyrus in the captain's hand.

"Surround and occupy the Pantheon immediately," ordered the King. "If the curl is not found, or if it has already vanished"—his eagle-like glance swept his listeners—"you will kill the man in whose possession you discover it. You are empowered to search any suspect." Then, as Agesilaos moved, Ptolemy added: "But not until the stars are in the heavens again. For till the evening we will rest after the fatigue of our night march."

When the sun had set, the King walked with freshened step through the gardens towards the sea and Konon's observatory.

"I know everything!" he declared menacingly. His spies had told him far more than the lovely Berenice would have wished.

The High Priest and Astrologer Supreme answered with the natural impassivity of a sage who has little or nothing to fear from death.

"Even if you know everything, O King, you know little. It is not a question of what happens, but why it happens. And the cause always lies in darkness. Or, at the most, only the stars shine upon it."

"Last night the Queen's curl disappeared," interrupted the King ungraciously, not concerned with any subtleties. "The man on whom it is found will be put to death. And on a man we shall find it, for the possession of the curl is too precious for a man to relinquish voluntarily."

"Yes, it will be found," affirmed Konon. "And the happy-unhappy possessor will die. But after centuries the world will still know of the failure of your marriage. Do not forget that through your victory you have become immortal. But this immortality might also be your everlasting shame!"

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The King's brow clouded.

"Can you suggest any other solution?" he asked.

The ancient Konon pointed upwards. "A royal one," he said, and an omniscient smile curved the lips above his snow-white beard which in itself resembled a not inconsiderable portion of the Milky Way. "Yes, a truly royal solution. The Gods offer it to you: whether you choose it is your affair."

"Do not speak in riddles!"

Konon motioned towards the pale yellow sky, in whose eastern domain the first star glimmered shyly. "In half an hour," he said, "the riddle will be no longer a riddle. Meanwhile, O King, I most humbly commend you to summon your court hither. I have a great event to disclose to you in its presence."

As the astrologer disappeared after these words into the black entrance of the towering observatory, the King thoughtfully contemplated his sandal straps; then, straightening up, he clapped his hands imperatively.

"The court!" he ordered to the kneeling servants, who, hastening backwards, scurried through the darkening alleys.

At once red eyes of torches flared, banners of smoke waved up from glowing brands, and in the midst of her women appeared Berenice, clad in floating white veils, which the irreverent night breeze pressed closely about her form. The court and retinue, illumined by the torches, took up its position in a semi-circle about the gloomy observatory. It was like a scene on the stage. The King, the principal player, stood in the open space before his court. Berenice could only see his back.

Then Agesilaos stepped forward, hand on sword. He made his report. In the Pantheon no trace of the curl had been discovered. There was, however, strong suspicion against——

"Later!" interposed the King, pointing up to the observatory, over the edge of which the flowing beard of the ancient Konon, illumined from below, had suddenly appeared. "Up there."

Agesilaos retired. A look of thwarted hatred shot towards Callimachos, standing close by the Queen, arms stoically folded as if to protect something hidden beneath them.

Konon beckoned from his tower.

"O Son of the Sun!" he cried down through cupped hands. "May it please you, the stars await!"

Ptolemy glanced round and nodded to those nearest. Then, leading, he slowly ascended towards the starry blue sky. The Queen, Agesilaos, Callimachos and one or two others of the royal suite followed the King, finally treading out on to the open observatory. The others lined the staircase right to the entrance of the tower. The torch-bearers had remained below, at Konon's request, for terrestrial lights do not match the heavenly ones, but they formed, drawing nearer, a magic circle of fire round the base of the observatory, whose basalt walls, lit by the many flares, changed to rose quartz.

At the top the King entered the astronomer's enchanted area. In the centre stood a round stone table, on whose polished surface Konon had etched his eight hundred and forty-six constellations, and near which rested his offset-staves and quadrants. A little on one side a kind of telescope jutted heavenwards at a sharp angle. The inventive Konon used this from time to time to focus his eyes upon certain stars, and it served to eliminate any side-light. By that instrument, pointing up like an outstretched arm, the astrologer waited for his guests. When they had filled the observatory, he came forward and turned to Ptolemy, who was leaning against the constellation table.

"O King," he began, "great fortune has befallen you.

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The Gods have heard the ardent prayers of your noble consort for your victory, and as a token they have mercifully accepted the sacrifice of the Queen's dear curl, and placed this lock of hair amid their eternal constellations. The new asterism hangs like a little golden cloud between the 'Lion' and the 'Maiden.' To-morrow, with your gracious consent, I shall inscribe it upon the chart of my records as the eight hundred and forty-seventh constellation I have been permitted to discover. But you, O King, shall gaze upon it as first of all mortals, for so have the Gods wished ! ”

As these words were spoken every one looked at the King, of whom, in the vague starlight, only the line of his slightly bowed neck could be seen. Motionless, the King appeared to consider, and all, even the Queen, held their breath, so important and so fateful his decision must be.

Then suddenly a faint sigh arose from the retinue. The King had advanced to the telescope and was peering up, assisted by Konon, at the firmament.

For a long while he remained silent. A very long while. Then he cried aloud as though all Egypt should hear : “ Yes, I see it ! I see Berenice's curl ! I can see it perfectly well.” He made room for his wife, to give her the opportunity of seeing her own hair drifting in the heavens. And there she did see it.

In the meantime, words passed from mouth to mouth like a summer breeze swelling to a storm wind : “ Berenice's curl ! Berenice's curl ! ” Never had a constellation been so swiftly and surely designated as this one.

Callimachos also looked, after the others, though before the grim Agesilaos. When he had stared thoughtfully for some time, the King spoke to him as he moved aside.

“ I know, Callimachos,” he said, “ it has long been your desire to return to your home in Ionia. That desire is

granted to you. You may depart. In the future live devoted entirely to the fine arts ! ”

Callimachos bowed under the Queen's gaze. He wanted to answer and could not, for the King had passed on while several were congratulating him, including Agesilaos, who still crackled his papyrus. Callimachos felt confused, because, despite all, he was not unwilling to go to Ionia and do there what every poet does when he has gained nothing—write a poem.

The golden disc of the full moon rose from the rim of the silver gleaming sea and all the near stars paled. Ptolemy had given Berenice his hand to guide her back through the whispering tumult to the palace, above whose marble roof the sky reflected the glow of many fires, the signs of victory from an intoxicated city. Silent, they walked side by side, each deep in their own thoughts.

“ She is more beautiful,” thought Ptolemy.

“ He is more manly,” thought Berenice. “ He left here a boy; he returns a man. And like a man, too, he has acted.”

And so under the high stars they entered the vast building.

On the threshold of her sleeping-apartments the King halted.

“ Is there another panther under your bed ? ” he asked as if waking from a dream.

Berenice sank her head, surprised, in a woman's fashion, repentant and subdued.

“ You may see for yourself,” she said, smiling in the moonlight as she softly passed through her door.

And the door was left open.

WINIFRED HOLTBY

Amiable Confessions

"Mother Knows Best"

I COULD write before I could read with comfort, and before I could write, I told stories. At the ages of three and four I was as implacable a narrator of impossibilities as the Ancient Mariner. I used to plant myself on a four-legged wooden stool in the middle of the cold stone floor of the dairy on my father's farm, and there, a book on my knee probably held upside down, I would "read" immense and interminable narratives to the amiable cook who scrubbed the shelves. I remember one novel recited in this fashion. It was called "Minnie's Berk." The book from which I pretended to read it was Nat Gould's *Magpie Jacket*, a favourite, because of the picture of a race-horse on the cover. What a "Berk" was, nobody knew but I. It was a portmanteaux word, invented from two which I had recently acquired—"beck," the shallow stream that stagnated rather than ran throughout our village, and "murky," which meant something dark, sinister and forbidding. Into that Berk Minnie was destined to fall. But the story had as many twists and turns as our village stream, and the cook had finished scrubbing the shelves, the bowls of milk, the panchion of home-made loaves, the saucer cheesecakes and pasties and jam jars were put away, and I had fled to seek an audience in the stable yard, long before Minnie reached her hideous destination.

WINIFRED HOLTBY

My next effort was editorial. Until I was about seven, my sister and I shared a governess with the daughters of the vicar from a village three miles away. Somebody—I am not sure if it was I—proposed that we should start a magazine. We did—in a half-finished exercise book. We each wrote our own contributions in turn and praised each other's efforts, until the vicar's younger daughter composed a poem in which occurred the couplet :

“ The herds
Of pretty birds.”

I have not the least recollection of the title of the magazine or the offending poem, nor have I now the slightest notion why so innocuous a phrase should move me to a fury of derision; but I can to this day remember my small friend's uneven childish printing on the ruled page of the book, and my merciless contempt as I danced round the school-room table chanting, in an ecstasy of disdain : “ The *herds* of pretty *birds*.”

Like other tactless criticisms, that broke our paper. We tried no more collaborations with the vicar's daughters.

At that time I was writing verse myself. Yards of it. Miles of it. What I was too idle to set down, I recited to my bored but tolerant sister. My mother encouraged me. In all emotional or domestic crises I was accustomed to console or exhort or admonish her with appropriately pious or didactic verses written on scraps of paper and handed solemnly to her, or laid upon her desk. Far from exposing these to the superior amusement of my elders, she treasured them carefully, and finally decided to exhibit them to a public wider than her appreciative self.

In 1911, when I was thirteen and had been for two years at a boarding school in Scarborough, I accompanied the matron one day just before the Christmas holidays into a stationer's shop in the Ramsgate Road to make some purchases. And there, beside the counter on a special stand, I saw a

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quantity of pretty little pink and pale green gift books, bound in paper and tied with purple ribbon, entitled : " My Garden and Other Poems by Winifred Holtby."

I felt—well, what would you have felt? I paid my sixpence—borrowed from the matron, who also, properly astonished, bought a copy. I returned to school—on air? No, in the air, a creature transformed (and doubtless most unpleasant). I might be plain, I might be bad at hockey, I might be delicate, tiresome, naughty and unpopular; but I had done something now that no girl in the school, no girl of my acquaintance (except a horrid little prig whose photograph I had once seen and hated in the *Girls' Realm*) had ever done before. I had published a book.

And what a book! The publication had been arranged (for a sum down, I imagine, though I have never asked) with a local firm. My mother's intention was, I think, to present me with a copy for Christmas; but the ways of publishers are not those of mothers. Commerce frustrated her. But what cared I for her intention? I have known since then countless moments of pleasure, several of rapture and a few of pride, but as I walked back to school with my first published work, I knew so dazzling an ecstasy of achievement that nothing experienced since has even approached it.

I still cherish one copy of those verses. The cover has gone; the pages are dog-eared; but the quality of the verse remains unaltered. I regret to confess it: that quality is execrable—priggish, derivative, nauseatingly insincere. I was, between the ages of seven and twenty-one, a creature of completely uncritical piety and sentimental convention. One of the earliest efforts runs thus :

Only

" Only a rose-bud
Tender and soft,
Dropped from a rose tree,
Waving aloft.

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Only a kind thought
Spoken by love,
Dropped like the rose-bud
From Heaven above.

But the wee rose-bud
Once pleasure gave;
The kind thought's remembered
Unto the grave."

The last effusion, entitled " Question and Answer," begins :

" Oh, how long is the path and how weary the struggle !
The road is so rough and so steep.
Oh, how far must I climb, and how long must I suffer
Before I can lay me to sleep ? "

Its first part ends with the inquiry :

" Oh, why should I suffer ? Oh, why should I struggle,
When fame is a-calling to me ?
Oh, why should I toil in the murk of the city
When I hear the grand roar of the sea ? "

I had at that time seen two cities only, Hull and London. I adored them both. But I suppose that toiling in urban murk had been presented to my imagination as an alternative to fame and freedom, and convention as usual overcame sincerity.

The most ambitious attempt in the volume was a fragment from an immense blank verse poem which I began to compose when, at the age of eleven, I smuggled a stable lantern into a box-room which opened from the nursery landing and retreated there, preferably at night, sucking a pencil over half-filled account books, glancing with delicious terror into the shadowy corners, where, among the piled boxes, trunks, curtains, chests, bedsteads and lumber, every kind of horror might lurk, then scribbling with a sense of terrified urgency pages and pages and pages of theological speculation. The fragment chosen by my mother and the puzzled schoolmaster begins thus :

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“Why should we mortals, rulers of this world,
Bow down ourselves to One who went before
And is long dead—One Who has passed before,
Whom we have never seen, nor e’er can see
Till the last trump shall sound, proclaiming all
At end? Both land and sea, and beasts and men,
All mortals to be ended, and the world,
And all the universe one bare blank space,
Devoid of light, of life, of everything
Save His own presence, making all things day;
And life and love perpetually there,
The end of all things, save of Him Himself.”

To my embarrassment they had given this effusion the title “In Milton’s Footsteps.” I cannot now remember whether my blushes were caused by resentment at the implications of imitativeness, or by my dawning awareness of ineptitude; but I do know that this seriously annoyed me.

All through my school days I continued intermittently to write verses. Some have been preserved in school magazines. Their quality did not improve conspicuously. But I was also experimenting with another form of expression—the form which throughout my life has most fascinated me, given me most pleasure, and brought no single vestige of success. I was writing plays.

Every Christmas holidays, my sister, a friend called Sybil and I used to compose and perform plays. These also were joint productions. Sybil, a clever child, later to gain an Oxford First and become for a short period a don at St. Hugh’s, preferred humour. She added most of the jokes. My pretty and gentle sister preferred dressing up and love scenes. I liked Drama. We did not write down the plays; we discussed and rehearsed them, composing the dialogue as we went along. To experienced charade-players, this method presented small difficulty.

We acted the plays in the front kitchen. This was an admirable place for amateur theatricals. Built in the days

when the farm hands "lived in," it was a long, bare room, with three doors opening off one end, and a fourth near the fire-place. Of the three end doors, two opened into cupboards, the third on to stairs leading up to the maid's bedroom and the box-room which had been my study and which now became a green room. Sides of bacon, hams in muslin bags, and Christmas puddings hung on hooks from the white-washed ceiling. On these hooks we fixed our curtains; in the cupboards we kept our "properties" and changes of scenery; up the stairs we fled to transform ourselves into the multitudinous characters we chose to play.

The first two plays, "The Highwayman's Curse" and "Grizelda's Vow," contained nothing more alarming to parental solicitude than a few murders, duels and the like, and one superb suicide when Grizelda (having accomplished her vow to murder her father's enemy) leapt from the kitchen window and flung a croquet ball on the stones below to represent her skull cracking. So, for the third play, my mother thought we might have a more exciting audience than the couple of maids and perhaps an aunt or two, who had applauded our other dramas. Perhaps she had watched with only drowsy attention, for she was a busy woman, and did not guess the macabre possibilities lurking in childish minds. Optimistically she invited the children from two or three neighbouring families and a few local adults to watch the play, and to a supper afterwards.

Spurred by the prospect, we rose to the occasion. This time I wrote a play and we laboriously learned it. It was called "A Living Lie."

It ran for four long acts and contained, among its milder amenities, one elopement, a strong scene of adultery, a case of leprosy, two murders and a suicide. The "Lie" was lived by a lady who contracted leprosy under most shady circumstances and murdered the doctor—who was also her lover—

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and her husband, to avoid deportation to Robben Island, before she stabbed herself across her lover's body.

Before the second act was over, one mother removed her family from the "theatre." Before the third, the audience was uneasy. After the lurid curtain, there was little applause. Next year my mother insisted that we should perform only a nice little comedy from French's acting edition—"Two Sharps and a Flat." Who wanted comedy? I was only consoled by a promise to play the heroine in one of my mother's best evening dresses, and to have an adult male friend, an experienced amateur to whom I was greatly attached, to "make me up." But after "A Living Lie," other people's silly jokes left me cold and I was totally at variance with those adult advisers who repeated to me the unconvincing platitude: "Mother knows best."

However, during my last year at school, in 1915, I wrote a drama called "Espionage" (a gross imitation of "Diplomacy"), and produced it with the entire Girl Guide Company in aid of the Red Cross. Out of a passion for originality and revolt against mob-emotion, I made my spy a beautiful but venal American and my German suspect guiltless.

But before this, I had blossomed again into print with my first two journalistic efforts. One was a description of the Bombardment of Scarborough, in which one of our school buildings was wrecked. This was extracted by my mother from a letter which I had written to the head girl of the school, who happened to be absent, copied and sent to a paper which not only printed it, but arranged for Australian syndication. The Bombardment was a "hot topical." The second was a passionate letter to the editor of a local paper against the British use of poison gas. Both were intensely high-minded, rhetorical and ingenuous, but my mother had prints taken of the Bombardment article and we sold them at threepence each for the Red Cross and made quite a little sum.

WINIFRED HOLTBY

So when, three weeks after my eighteenth birthday, I left school and went to London to train as a probationer nurse in a civilian nursing home, I had seen my poems published in a book, my article and letter in a paper, and my plays produced, in some sort of fashion, on a stage. But from 1915 to 1919 I never even attempted further publication. During the eight months after the Armistice, while I was still in France, I wrote a series of sketches about the Waac camp where I was stationed, but I had begun to exercise for the first time a certain measure of self-criticism; I knew my work to be sentimental, diffuse, impossible. When I returned from France to Oxford, the tutors who read my essays confirmed my opinion.

I am one of the very few women I know who went to Oxford because my mother wished it, rather than from any very strong personal impetus or scholastic pressure or family tradition. Moreover, when I went there, I was docile. When my immensely long, muddled and emotional history essays were condemned, I accepted the condemnation. It was, I recognised, just. But I set myself with diligence and distress to remedy my shortcomings. I was told that an essay should have a beginning, a middle and an end; that its argument should be capable of division into points, one, two, three, four and five; that these points should be stated briefly, lucidly and without undue decoration. Term by term I set myself to produce from my fuddled, nebulous and fragmentary impressions of the past, something more neatly and concisely designed to satisfy my tutors. I thought I was learning how to Get a First and please my mother and my tutors. I did neither. What I was learning was how to earn my living as a journalist and please myself.

I left Oxford with a laborious but undistinguished Second in History, three or four lugubrious verses printed in university magazines, and one ephemeral literary achievement, the joint authorship of a wild farce performed as "Going

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Down Play " at Somerville, called " Bolshevism in Bagdad." As a mixed skit on Chu Chin Chow, Antony and Cleopatra, and university politics, it had moments.

But I already had another manuscript in preparation. One day at a coaching on economic history, A. L. Smith, the late Master of Balliol, had directed our attention to the ruthlessness of economic processes, new phases driving out old; the good of yesterday becoming the evil of to-day; the past making way for the future. And watching his wise old face (for he was then over seventy, dwindled and a little shrunk, though brilliantly alive), I suddenly realised as though in a flash of revelation—Yes, that's it; that's true; that's what happened.

For my father had left the farm which I had loved, and sold it while I was still in the army, and retired to a provincial suburb because he felt unable to cope with the problems of post-War conditions. He was delicate; he was growing elderly; he had never learned how to deal with the new phenomena of government inspection, statutory laws, wage boards and trade unions. He had retired; and part of my heart, I thought, was broken.

But when I listened to A. L. Smith, that breach was mended. I went back to my room and began at once to make notes for the novel I determined to write about it, to instruct myself in the reason for that change which had previously seemed to me an unmitigated tragedy. I forced myself to read histories of agriculture, of trade unionism, of Socialism. I tried to set the drama of rural Yorkshire as I knew it, as it had filled my whole horizon until the War destroyed a small and settled world, against the background of historical change and progress, and gradually, reading and thinking, I comforted myself, and invented a story of a young woman (twenty-nine I made her, and, God forgive me, thought her middle-aged !) married to a much older farmer, and confronted by cir-

cumstances similar to those which proved too much for my frail and gentle father. Two years later, after many vicissitudes, the story was published under the title of "Anderby Wold" by the Bodley Head.

Meanwhile, I had been trying my hand at other, more remunerative businesses. I taught in schools, I lectured, I was part-time secretary to a Member of Parliament. I wrote articles, a few, a very few, of which would be accepted. But I kept trying to remember the instructions of my tutors at Oxford—that an essay has a beginning, a middle and an end; and that its argument must be capable of clear, lucid statement under headings that could be numbered one, two and three.

So one day, when I was working in Bethnal Green as secretary to Sir Percy Harris, M.P., and as a member of a group of after-care committees for school children, I planned a series of articles on the "human side" of the L.C.C. educational machine, and sent them to Lady Rhondda at *Time and Tide*. She had previously rejected several of my manuscripts, but I had read her paper avidly since its first appearance, and was hardened to rejections. This time she did not return the manuscript. She invited me to lunch at her Chelsea flat.

The first thing I noticed when I reached her presence was that, in spite of the fact that I felt almost morbidly shy, I could not stop talking; the second was that there was lobster for lunch. I have the stomach of an ostrich; I flourished on Army rations; I had been a pantry-pilferer since youth, eating once, I remember, even an accidental mixture of treacle and potted turkey with relish; but lobster I could not manage. Still, there it was. There was the first editor who had ever shown a sign of taking my work seriously, and there was the lobster, rich, pink, formidable on lettuce leaves. I had a feeling that if I rejected her lobster, she had a right to reject my articles. I ate what was set before me. When offered

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more, I took more. I endured throughout the interview. I departed no sooner than was seemly. And then I fled to Sloane Square station, where I was very, very sick. But *Time and Tide* took the articles; Lady Rhondda soon appointed me as a regular note and leader writer, first on educational, then on general political subjects. She took in hand the correction of my style, making me write and rewrite my notes until they were at least readable and comprehensible. Four years later, I became a director of the paper.

As I look back it seems that I have been led, pushed and prodded into authorship. In my betters, genius has burned, an indomitable flame, in spite of the threatening winds of opposition. I was never opposed; I was grossly, undeservedly, and with astonishing optimism, encouraged from the outset, by my mother, my school teachers, my Oxford tutors and my editors. The only form of composition which I chose for myself, insisted upon producing, and performed against odds, was that of writing plays. Is it wholly irrelevant that this is the only kind in which I have had no success whatever? I still write plays; I still send them to producers; they are still rejected. Is it true, can it be true—that detested formula repeated to my incredulous youth: “Mother knows best”?

In the October number of the magazine, Helen Simpson [author of Boomerang, The Woman and the Beast, etc.] made the first contribution to the series of autobiographical articles which we are publishing under the general title of “Amiable Confessions.” Margaret Irwin [author of Royal Flush, The Proud Servant, etc.] contributed the second article to the series in the November number. Winifred Holthy, who makes the third contribution, is the author of several novels, the best-known of which are Poor Caroline, and Mardoa, Mandoa. Her deft satirical pen ably lampooned the natives of this island in The Astonishing Island.

*The Wilderness Awakes*¹

EVER greyer and more grey grew the landscape as I sat motionless beneath a venerable jack-pine at the water's edge, awaiting what a new-born day might bring.

He who would probe deeply and intimately into the secrets of that hour of hush and mystery that, like a half-world, hangs just within the realm of unreality, will not gain his ends by early rising. Better by far that he sleep not at all; for let him step his sprightliest, his faculties, numbed a little and dulled by slumber, will lack something of keen alertness and sensitive perception.

During that dim hour between the passing of night and the coming of daylight, all of the Wild that has the power of locomotion is abroad. Creatures whose gift it is to pursue their labours during the hours of darkness have not yet retired to rest, and those whose conscious life is spent in the more generous effulgence of the sun have awakened to a new activity. Sounds have more penetration and are audible at greater distances than at other times, scents and odours are more pungent and hang heavy in the early morning air, pro-

¹ A Book by Grey Owl, a North American Indian, will be published in the spring.

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claiming with certainty the presence of an enemy, or of food. Birds and beasts that are seldom to be seen or heard at any other time, now carry on their appointed tasks and indulge in play and pastimes with a feeling of security that either the brilliance of full sunlight or the obscurity of night fails to give them.

This is an hour of mystery, of strange sights and unaccustomed sounds, and when the eye and ear are tuned to their highest efficiency. No impression, however fleeting, escapes the perception of senses keyed to a hair-trigger delicacy by the tonic properties of this magic hour. There are no shadows, and on the flat perspective of the middle distance, objects that would melt vaguely into the lights and shades of noon-day now stand out in sharp and definite outline. The faint echo of a broken twig in the dry brule,¹ the swiftly changing contour on the side-hill that is a deer, the soundless flight of a pair of whiskey jacks, spectral in the half-light, are recorded instantly and without conscious mental effort.

And so I sat silent, motionless beneath the fan-topped jack-pine, and waited.

The Aurora had long since ceased its *danse macabre*, and across the face of the paling sky there moved in slow and stately procession lines of clouds, battleship grey.

Behind me was an enchanted world of twilight forest, where the portentous silence was broken by no sound, save the occasional drip of dew from the leaves. On its floor one would have moved in a kind of pale translucence, as in some dim ocean cavern, where common objects loomed crouching, indistinct and shapeless, and the fronds of scattered clumps of undergrowth hung like queer aquatic-looking plants, in this green and liquid pool of murky light.

Above my head, from somewhere in the jack-pine, a white-throat commenced his carolling. The first few plaintive notes

¹ Burnt-over country, with new growth. Of French origin.

GREY OWL

stole out into the silence tentatively, as though seeking a response, and, being answered, broke forth courageously into a full volume of song. Ever increasing in numbers, the feathered choir joined in the litany of joy and praise for the gift of a new day, until all around the air seemed full of harmony.

As the light increased a fog rose above the water, and lay thinly in folds and layers with openings in between. Out from this I saw, swimming towards me along the shoreline, a creature that had all the semblance of some dark amphibious reptile, with a large head and a long, sinuous body. Its back was ornamented with a row of excrescences such as are seen on a floating crocodile, and was divided into small, close-fitting segments, giving it the appearance of a jointed wooden snake.

Now being the hour of spells and witchery, I regarded this apparition with some interest. On its approaching within range of my unobstructed vision, it resolved itself into nothing more dangerous than a mud-hen leading a parade of ten tiny black chicks, who swam behind her in file, following faithfully the weaving course of their parent with serpentine exactitude. Almost immediately there came the sudden heavy thudding slap of a beaver's tail on the water, and the entire family disappeared abruptly beneath the overhanging alders; nor did any sound or ripple from then on betray their further presence.

At the warning sound a kitten beaver that, tired with a night of small explorations, had fallen asleep in the warmth of my two hands, scrambled hastily down to the water and also disappeared. The last lingering echoes of the tocsin of alarm had barely died away before the originator of it himself appeared, and with a deep prolonged mumble of greeting climbed ashore and performed an unconcerned and very elaborate toilet.

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The weird and ghoulish cachinnation of the grey owls, they of the Shining Beak,¹ had not yet ceased, and at intervals broke forth into an indescribable tumult, an unearthly sound, suggestive of the unholy laughter of a crew of demons, or the obscene revels of a band of monsters. This discordant clamour disturbed the beaver not a whit, but the sharp "chuck," as a flying squirrel, not yet abed, landed expertly on the bare trunk of the pine behind my back, caused him to take the water with one movement, in a neat, clean dive. The direction of his line of flight was marked by a row of tell-tale bubbles, evidence that he had not been seriously alarmed, as in cases of real emergency these animals are able to so arrange their manner of retreat that the air is not allowed to escape from the fur. By what means this is accomplished I have yet to determine, but it is probably connected in some way with the manner of using the tail, as it is only from a spot just above this appendage that these bubbles rise. The little grey rodent still clung flatly to the bark of the jack-pine, his gliding apparatus still spread out, so that he looked to be about six inches square; and as he stared out of his big round night-eyes, I doubt if he even saw me. He had volplaned from the top of a lofty tree about forty feet away, and I had noticed that the last twenty feet or so of his flight had been flat, with a distinct upward trend towards the end of it. The sound he made had been slight, but the beavers had become unusually wary of late, and with good cause. Not many days ago a she-bear with two cubs had dug up several bees' nests within a stone's throw of the cabin; and only the morning before a lone coyote had shown himself, cantering effortlessly along just within the border of the woods lining the far shore of the lake; a grey, lean, furtive beast, slipping unobtrusively along, flickering wraith-like between the tree trunks.

¹ So called by the Indians on account of his white shiny beak. This bird laughs hideously in certain seasons.

GREY OWL

The cabin was visible from my point of vantage, and at the door I had placed a piece of apple, my usual early morning offering to a red squirrel that lived near by. He had not yet appeared, and presently a musk-rat, eyes, ears and nostrils alert, with many backward runs and false alarms, trotted up to the door, seized on the booty and scurried away with it, no doubt considering himself well rewarded for his perilous sortie. Presently the squirrel for whom the offering was intended would come for his accustomed tit-bit, and finding it gone would scold shrilly and rush madly about, breathing anathema and searching for imaginary enemies.

Within the near-by beaver lodge the murmur of voices and other strangely domestic sounds had died down, and the feeble infantile wailing that had commenced at feeding time, for the juveniles, had also subsided. Above the water a flock of terns performed their evolutions with swift swooping and shrill cries, and a pair of loons swam by on their regular morning round, so close that their red eyes were plainly visible. The male gave vent at intervals to a low plaintive note, not unmusical, and not to be heard at any great distance. Noble birds they were, with their white breasts and alert, independent bearing. They saw me and checked momentarily, watching me curiously, and I had a good look at them. The female had a young one with her, jet black and not much bigger than a chick partridge, that sat upon her back and viewed from there the scenery with great complacency.

The light mist that for some time had hung over the water, had by now disappeared; and the surface of the little lake, before so smooth and glassy as to be scarcely distinguishable from the void above it, now became blurred in streaks as some finger of a breeze touched its face, and the leafy crowns of some tall white poplars, pink with the first high-flung shafts of the coming sunrise, fell into an iridescent fluttering. The slim and limber, graceful aspens that stood out upon a little

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point, commenced to bow and nod and gently bend and sway, as the song of the morning wind whispered in their foliage. Beneath the sombre arches of the forest of evergreens, lights and shadows formed and fell apart, and as the bright places became brighter, so the shadows were the darker; whilst far above the heavy canopy of fan-like limbs, the towering spires of the spruce, tipped with carmine, stabbed the sky like crimson-headed lances.

Down from the North, headed for the big lakes, a company of pelicans, blood-red in the glow, winged their unhurried way just clear of the tree-tops. They moved in echelon, and held their course in precise and orderly array. These birds seem to have evolved a great economy of labour in their method of progression by flying and gliding alternately, so that they rest half of the time and must be able to go on indefinitely. This change in the manner of using their wings occurs at regular intervals, and is accomplished without the slightest change in speed or formation, and with no loss of elevation during the gliding process. The leader sets the stroke, followed by the next in line, and each picks up the "step" successively from the one ahead of him, just fly, then glide: fly and glide. This disciplined conduct is marvellous to behold, and, like most of the expedients which Nature has devised to promote the safety or efficiency of its children, is the result of countless ages of evolution and strict adherence to the gospel of the line of least resistance. Purposeful, undeviating and tireless, they pursued their chosen route and soon were gone.

Abruptly the sun, that had been smouldering behind the rampart of the hills, blazed up in flaming brilliance.

The sudden rattle and tap of a woodpecker drummed a startling *réveillé*.

The Wilderness was awake and about its business.

Murderers in Fiction

Mr. Milward Kennedy, one of the most distinguished of contemporary detective-story writers, contributed an article, "Are Murders Meant?" to the November number of L.D.M. In that article he discussed the question of pre-meditated murders, analysing the point in the projection of a crime of this type at which the murderer's mind moves from passive introspection of the plan to active scheming. In the following article he illustrates his observations by reference to famous murders in fiction.

THIS is a personal article, since it must to some extent be a confession of failure; and it is neither good taste nor good policy to try to generalise failure.

I suggested in a previous article that a study of historical cases of murder will show that just as there are a great number of different motives for murder, so the decision and intention may take one of many different aspects. I suggested also that if one attempts to measure the degree of horror of a murder by the kind or the amount of premeditation which it seems to have involved, one must not follow any "rule of thumb" method; certainly no such simple rule as "the

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greater the premeditation, the fouller the murder " could be upheld for a moment.

It seemed to me that it would then be interesting to turn from fact to fiction. In real life one can only guess at what goes on in the minds of one's fellow-creatures; and to guess what goes on in the mind of a murderer is especially difficult, if one's own homicidal tendencies are reasonably quiescent. Where the action of killing obviously follows a process of planning, there must presumably have been a moment when the murderer takes a decision—and knows that he takes it—to kill. What have the writers of fiction to tell us, or to suggest, about the thought-processes which lead to that decision?

At first sight, it seems obvious that there must be many novels dealing with the subject. It is surprising, however, how few authors, in fact, seem to assume an omnipotent knowledge of a murderer's mind even when it is of their own creation.

Bill Sykes, it may be argued, had no thoughts at all; to kill no more needed a decision than to blaspheme. Similarly, where a novel introduced a murder committed in a blind rage, the author would naturally be concerned mainly with externals; to describe from within the loss of all control would not be particularly profitable, from the artist's standpoint.

There are two types of "crime story" with which I imagined I had not greatly to concern myself in my search through my own memory. On the one hand, there is the "thriller," the book which describes crime from the outside, observes no set conventions and depends for its effect chiefly upon rapidity of movement. Here one looks for an objective description of the act of murder, but little about the preliminary processes; the thriller, as a rule, is not at all analytical.

The second discard was the classical detective story. Here, too, there is not much concern about those processes of thought; the mind which is primarily of interest is that of the man who is set to probe the mystery of the murder. At most this gives a second-hand, or a badly reflected, picture of the mind of the murderer. As a rule, the detective story concerns itself with what follows the crime, not with what precedes it. There are, it is true, exceptions where crime and detection run side by side, yet even so they are in the main objective in their treatment; they are analytical only by proxy of the murderer's mind.

I realise, of course, that many people draw no distinction between "thrillers" and detective stories, and dismiss the lot as unfit to be treated as literature, or to be read. Possibly if they reflected they would guess that there may be as much difference between one such story and another as there is between one "romance" and another. It may be that they do an unintentional injustice to Stevenson, or Poe, or Dostoevsky.

Still, it seemed unlikely that I should find the history of the murderer's thoughts, leading to his decision to kill, amongst the detective stories; the conventions of the *genre* more or less precluded such a thing.

Where, then, in general literature could I expect to find my fictional revelations of what, in fact, is a mystery?

How about Dickens? There are plenty of violent deeds in his pages. A Bill Sykes provided a parallel for the lowest type of murderer, but was of no use for my restricted purpose. What, then, of *Our Mutual Friend*, for example? But the more I reflected upon Dickens the more I realised that he, too, treated the murderers objectively. A strand of murder runs through the length of *Our Mutual Friend*; the reader is never in much doubt about Bradley Headstone's

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murderous intentions or possibilities, but of the inner workings of his thoughts there is hardly a glimpse—not even in the brief scene which precedes his final struggle with Riderhood. The book gave me two examples of murder—the one premeditated, the result of jealousy, the other spontaneous, the murder and suicide as a better fate than to be discovered a murderer but alive; but neither example gave me more than can be found in the newspaper report of a trial.

Perhaps it was foolish to look so far back for introspective fiction. Did not earlier novelists mainly concern themselves with the description of character and of action from the outside? And then I thought of *The Ebb Tide*, which at once presented me with several interesting specimens for my collection. For the greater part of the book the reader looks at things from the standpoint of Herrick, the man who fails from weakness of will. Stevenson shows two moments of decision by Herrick, but both are in the nature of revelation rather than of reason: one is the decision to drown himself, the other the decision to live. But of Captain Davis there is a revealing study. Here is a man with a mixture of good and evil propensities. He considers his physical situation; his only way out of his *impasse* is to kill Attwater and seize his island. Attwater must be killed as a matter of practical expediency. Immediately (and to counteract a recoil of conscience) the decision of expediency is supported by a sentiment of anger at the recollection of Attwater's contemptuous attitude over-night. The decision is definite; the vicious little clerk is summoned so that the two may contrive ways and means. Huish is the professional killer, the machine which works as soon as the button is pressed. And then Davis learns how Huish proposes to kill, and recoils from the use of vitriol, and reacts still more violently when he realises that Huish has employed that method before.

The sequel is extremely interesting and plausible. Huish becomes the leader, the decider; Davis's squeamishness he sweeps aside as lack of courage; Davis becomes the acquiescent but protesting accomplice. To me this seems plausible and likely to be true to life. If it be so, it becomes possible for the chief actor in a crime when that crime is committed not to be truly responsible for the premeditation and the decision.

Stevenson led me on to Conrad. I have known people complain that in a Conrad novel nothing happens; to which the easiest reply is to tot up the killings in such a book as *Victory*. Since, however, Conrad made action subordinate to thought and emotion, I expected to find some useful hints in his books. But Conrad was particularly interested in the practical and usually disastrous results of indecision. Heyst's tragedy was, in a sense, that he could not kill; Jones's, that to him killing meant nothing. I found *The Secret Agent* more useful for my purpose, yet even there the principal murder came from something akin to indecision. When the incompetent Verloc blew his brother-in-law to pieces, it was his way of avoiding murder. He had to do something sensational by others' decision, and that was the only piece of sensationalism of which he could think. His own murder by Mrs. Verloc was the result of a sudden decision, an idea suggested by the chance thought of "knife." Her premeditated action was to go away; the decision to kill and the killing were barely separated in time. Nor was this only blind rage, it had also the element of judicial execution. I do not think that a Hamlet offers much help; it is useless to study a decision which to the killer is one to execute, but not to murder.

By this time I saw that to deal adequately with my self-imposed task, I ought to embark upon an immense task of

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reading and re-reading. It is, I found, extremely hard to remember whether an author has, in fact, described the processes of thought, or has only given so vivid an impression of a character that the reader invents the thoughts for himself.

Take, for example, *Crime and Punishment*. I could have sworn that there was a full analysis of how Raskolnikoff came to the decision to kill the pawnbroker-woman, almost as full as that of his mental struggle afterwards with the detective. It is not so. When the book opens, Raskolnikoff believes that he has taken his decision; he believes that his first visit to the pawnbroker is a rehearsal. That is made quite clear, though I think that the reader is permitted to judge that the youth has deceived himself. He has taken a provisional decision; and then he is beset by fresh financial troubles, and he has a dream—a nightmare—which surely represents the subconscious acceptance and confirmation of the provisional decision.

From this it was a short step to *Men of Good Will*. Romaine adopts the omnipotent attitude, of knowing and revealing all that is in the minds of his creatures. He makes Quinette a man whom one can accept as true and yet cannot understand. It would be difficult to take him as a type of murderer, because his motive for murdering the murderer whom he has befriended is entirely individual. Yet clearly his decision is the result of much thought, conscious and unconscious. I do not think that it is possible to take a page and a paragraph and say "Here! This is where he decides." One cannot go further than to say that *his* dream or nightmare, like Raskolnikoff's, is a sign that without his own conscious realisation his decision has been taken.

The idea of the decision taken half unconsciously, if not actually in a dream or vision, seems to be one that appeals to the inventor: Dostoevsky and Romaine and—if I am not

mistaken—Shakespeare (“Is this a dagger?” and so forth).

Indeed, Shakespeare, I believe, provides a specimen of almost every sort of murder, and the soliloquies fairly replace the modern novelist’s omniscience. Othello the man who saw red—Hamlet the executioner of justice . . .

The modern stage, bare of soliloquies, is usually as objective as the classical novelist, though in passing it is to be observed that in that successful play *Ten Minute Alibi* the murderer’s premeditation and decision take the form once more of a dream. But the stage is another story: novels involve plenty of research, and the list of them would be incomplete without a reference to one or two which definitely centre round a murder. If Oliver Onions had written *According to the Evidence* this year instead of, I suppose, twenty odd years ago, it would surely have been a best seller. It is a long time since I read it, and it seems hard to get hold of a copy; is my recollection at fault, or is it the first and one of the very best stories of a “murder from inside”? Does it not convincingly show the growth of the intention to murder and the actual moment of decision? It is, as I recollect it, an example of unconditional, deliberate premeditation. The crime depended for its success on its careful planning; but the wife’s horror when she realised the truth was not increased because the crime had been successfully planned.

Francis Iles rediscovered the Oliver Onions vein. But does *Malice Aforethought* clearly distinguish the exact moment when the murderer takes his decision? That, I suggest, is a question for an examination paper, to be answered without the aid of books; I wonder how many candidates would be misled by the recollection of the first sentence of the book?

As I have said, at the beginning of my inquiry I eliminated

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detective stories. When I reached Francis Iles, I thought of them again, for the detective element is strong in his first and (I think) better book. A very little reflection showed me that I was wrong about my fellow-practitioners.

It is difficult to write books about the unmasking of murderers without being led to make some study of their ways. Two at least of the best writers of the classical detective story have drawn pictures of the processes which may lead a man to murder. Freeman Wills Crofts perhaps allowed material considerations to weigh unnaturally with his hero-villain, but Henry Wade has showed that an inventor of clues and sleuths can also be a romantic. For that matter, his description of the Saltings is better than any but a few of our "straight" novelists could achieve.

What conclusions can be drawn, therefore, about the descriptions in fiction of the way in which a murderer makes up his mind? I at least can draw very few; there seems to be a dearth of such descriptions, and fewer still are of murderers who can be regarded as in any way typical. I may, of course, be wrong about Quinette; he is certainly interesting, and he may later on prove that he is not a case for the alienist (though some may say that every murderer is that). Meanwhile Mr. Iles is beginning to have his imitators, of a kind. I hope that more of them will go to the Old Bailey for help, as well as to Bloomsbury; I think that the wise plan is to take the drab facts and deduce the murderer's mind from them, rather than to premise a mind and see what sort of a crime it might conceivably produce.

My final conclusion is, of course, that I had better re-read a great many books with which, till I wrote this article, I believed myself familiar. For example, *The American Tragedy*—but I think I will stop short, and leave it to the reader to compile the full list for me.

The Fourth Old Lady

EVERY morning precisely at eleven o'clock the three old ladies met at the park gates and went and sat in the thatched arbour in a secluded part of the municipal gardens.

It was very pleasant there; the arbour was sheltered from the wind and rain by a belt of trees, and yet on the hottest days somehow remained quite cool. There were two long benches facing each other within the arbour, but the three old ladies always occupied only the one. In their fading minds they placed on the opposite bench their nearest and dearest, and the memories of their lost ones.

It had become a retreat to which they could take themselves out of the way of their busy, preoccupied daughters and daughters-in-law, and those of their sturdy grandchildren who were not yet of the school age, regarding themselves, as had become their habit, as outside life. They had done their part, and were content to lean back and watch the surging life of the younger, more forceful generation pass them by.

In their slow and solemn walk from the park gates to the arbour nothing missed their eyes. Their approach was full of acute observations of the exact time of closing the park,

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the fall of the leaves, the chittering of the birds, the notices directing that dogs must be led by a leash, and those daring them to raise their skirts over the iron hoops and walk on the wiry, cropped grass.

The three—Mrs. Blackler, Mrs. Quinlan and Mrs. Hood—were dressed all in black, with nodding bonnets. Mrs. Blackler held herself very erect, so that her gold locket dangled down over her flat breasts, and she frequently raised her long, thin hand to stay its pendulum-like movements. Her sharp, grey eyes were sunk far back in her long-jawed face, coldly civil and intolerant.

She was definitely a woman who spoke her mind, condemnatory, peevish in her old age, and with a narrow sense of morality. Her thin, censorious lips drew back over her teeth, deepening the lines at the corners of her mouth into a kind of snarl that was effective in frightening the children into quietness, and was enhanced by the dark growth of hair beneath the black nostrils of her prominent, deeply curved nose.

She was, being only sixty-seven, the youngest of the three.

Mrs. Quinlan's great trial in life, apart from the peculiar pigheadedness of her daughter-in-law, was asthma. She suffered from a croaking voice, constrained breath, and when a coughing fit took hold of her, her grey hair fell forward about her drawn brows. She had always maintained, with a commiserating glance of inward woe, that it was the constant looping forward of her hair, and not her repeated coughing, that gave her the headache. Yet she refused vigorously all sensible suggestions: she was not "tying up her hair at the back with a slide *or* a bit o' ribbon like some tatting girl."

She was round-shouldered, with a stooping back that

belied her height. A pearly brooch fastened the neck of her black silk blouse, closed to protect her throat. She could not cure herself of imagining the brooch slipping undone and the pin accidentally sticking into her throat. She was seventy-one years old, and, on account of her cough, was frugal of speech, managing by twitching her face and gesturing to convey her meaning admirably.

Practically the whole of the old ladies' conversation fell upon Mrs. Blackler, for besides Mrs. Quinlan being so handicapped, little Mrs. Hood was rather hard of hearing.

Mrs. Hood was a very small woman, with nervous hands, a round chin delicately modelled, and an air of faded prettiness. Her face was the colour of ivory, and was as thin and cracked as a piece of old china. She had never succeeded in wearing false teeth, and the loss of her teeth caused her prim mouth to sink inwards. As she walked along the path with her two friends, her spare body neat and tidy, her moist blue eyes would peer over the rims of her spectacles as if she were dimly afraid of what lay before her.

She was seventy-eight, the oldest of the three, and by the time they had settled their frames comfortably on the bench, the frail old lady would be quite exhausted. She would fold her hands in her lap and strain to hear what Mrs. Blackler was saying to Mrs. Quinlan's monosyllabic grunt, but she nearly always failed to catch what was being said. When they spoke directly at her, she would go on smiling and wave her hands for them to carry on, that all was well. After a while she would quietly drop off to sleep.

Her mouth would fall slightly open, and when her two friends heard the faint sibilant sound of her breath stirring through her lips, they would gaze at her clasped hands and nod smilingly at each other. They understood just how

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much she valued this short morning doze. She was living with her married daughter, and, in the words of her two friends, she had "something to put up with." In a household composed of unruly twins, a sullen, over-worked and under-paid husband, and her daughter, utterly changed by sordid domesticity, Mrs. Hood was made to feel "in the way." Sometimes in her sleep her lips moved faintly and she would murmur a name. She would sigh deeply and a slight tremor would shake her body.

Then they knew she was dreaming. But whatever the dream, she always failed to recollect it. . . .

She would wake up refreshed and with sufficient energy to get back home in time to meet the twins from school. The three old ladies always took the long walk back in order to avoid passing the cemetery, where the clustered tombstones receded in disorderly fashion from the path. . . .

And then there came a day when there was a fourth old lady.

It was a hot day in July, the brilliant sunshine beating down through the leaves as the three bonnets went nodding along the gravel path. Each looked forward to the quiet coolness of the arbour. Mrs. Quinlan felt the nervous signs of an approaching headache, Mrs. Blackler was already perspiring under the arms, and Mrs. Hood's small round face had taken on the colour of wax. Despite their physical discomforts, their minds were at rest, settled in the day-to-day habits of their lives. They did not question the meaning of life: they had married, struggled, and reproduced themselves; had carried on the torch of life through long years and anxious moments, and now were content to hand it on for others to play their part.

The three old ladies placidly rounded the bend in the path by the rhododendron bushes, and then, in the opening

to the harbour, they stopped. They stood motionless, shocked and tremulous.

There was no doubt that the sleeping figure sprawled along one of the benches was drunk; little grunting sounds issued from between the scarlet, puffed-out lips.

Mrs. Blackler drew back her lips in a grimace of disparity and condemnation. Mrs. Quinlan regarded the lay figure with a sort of drooping forlornness, stuttering in dismay. Mrs. Hood's eyes roved from face to face interrogatively, then she took half a step forward and peered timidly over the rim of her spectacles in frank wonderment.

The fourth old lady was stoutly built and full-bosomed. She was perspiring freely; her soft, squat nose was red and shining, and several strands of her hair, which was of an indeterminate greyness, clung wetly to her heavy, bag-like cheeks. Her skirt was fastened at the side with a large safety-pin and at the top with a piece of knotted white elastic. The heels of her shoes were trodden down, a hole had been worn in the left sole. Cheap rings glittered on each hand, and against her breast she clutched an immense bag with a broken strap-handle. Crowning this, a large hat with a peacock's feather stuck in at a jaunty angle lay crushed at the back of her head, and, what was even worse, one of her eyes was badly bruised; the discoloration surrounding the rim of the eye was of a hideous, greenish-yellow hue.

The three old ladies seated themselves on the opposite bench with a suppressed air of confusion, and surveyed the fourth old lady with nudges and whispered comments. However, an irritation arose in Mrs. Quinlan's throat, and she yielded to the need to cough. The harsh, scraping sound had quite an effect.

"Ouch! Oh-h-h! No, I ain't! Get off, you big——!"

The fourth old lady awoke with a gasping start, muttering

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darkly to herself, pushed her hat more awry and rubbed her rings along her nose.

She gave an immense yawn and sniffed, fiercely, through her nostrils; with a lot of heaving and blowing she managed to struggle into a sitting posture. She was dishevelled and dirty, and her eyebrows were dark and painted. Then she saw the three old ladies seated facing her. Damp-faced, as much surprised at her surroundings as at them, she stared for fully half a minute at the three prim and respectable figures, then gave a loud and exceedingly repulsive giggle.

Two deep creases appeared at the corners of Mrs. Blackler's lips; she sat bolt upright in a stiff and dignified position, severe and didactical. Mrs. Quinlan frowned with a certain resentful querulousness, whilst Mrs. Hood merely sat and gazed, her blue eyes blinking rapidly.

The fourth old lady roared at them in a loud, hoarse voice: "Hello, dears. Had a nice ta-ta?"

Her tone was purposely offensive. At their set stares, she leant back on the bench and laughed heartily, her big breasts shaking.

Then she said, gustily, "Don't mind me. Only my game. Been 'avin' a little celebration, I 'ave."

"Indeed," said Mrs. Blackler frigidly.

"You think I'm drunk? Well, I'm not, see?" she said rudely, sticking out her chin.

The sudden jerk of her head brought her hat down over her forehead, and, very deliberately, she set it at a seductive angle.

"Disorderly, as they calls it, I 'ave been, but drunk—never! There ain't a liquor can get *me* down," she asserted with pride.

Fully conscious of their concentrated gaze, she drew the large bag towards her by its broken strap and fumbled about

in it, swearing when a pin caught her finger. At length she rummaged out of it a box of powder, and began applying the floury substance to her nose and cheeks with the aid of her finger-tips, rubbing it into the grimy wrinkles beneath her eyes, and gently dabbing it over the discoloured rim of her bruised eye, emitting little squeaks of pain. Much she spilled on to her skirt, not troubling to brush it off, and when she closed the box, a little cloud puffed out into the air. She blew at it with distended cheeks, then slyly she glanced at the opposite three, leaning back with her arms along the back of the bench, tittering to herself.

"There!" she exclaimed. Then, to Mrs. Hood, whose mouth had fallen open, she said in a stagy whisper, with half a glance towards the others: "D'you know who I am, eh? I'm Dolly." Then, at the little woman's uncomprehending stare, she repeated cheerfully and stridently, "Dolly! I'm Dolly."

Mrs. Hood heard, and replied in a quiet, but surprisingly distinct voice, "I'm afraid I've never heard of you."

Dolly looked at all three with a mixed expression of suspicion and incredulity. "Dolly! Haven't you heard of Dolly? Why, I've 'ad my name in the papers umpteen times. I'm Dolly; and I've just come out from servin' my hundredth conviction. There!"

Mrs. Blackler and Mrs. Quinlan drew right back on their seats; they might both have been struck severely in the face. Mrs. Hood's eyes glimmered behind her spectacles.

"Well, I never!" she said in wondering tones. "And what is your last name?"

Dolly let out a shriek. "My *last* name! Which one?"

"Your *surname*."

"My surname! Dearie, I've buried six husbands in my

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time. Yes, and nineteen kids I've 'ad, five of which are still living."

Mrs. Blackler smiled disdainfully, while Mrs. Quinlan was at once fascinated and deeply outraged at the magnificent lies. Mrs. Hood sat as if spellbound.

"You think I'm fibbin'?" Dolly guessed astutely. "Well, I'm not. It's in the police records!" After a pause she threw at them with an air of asperity: "I don't suppose you'll believe me when I tell you my age?"

"Oh, how old are you?" eagerly asked little Mrs. Hood.

"Try an' guess," offered Dolly with a magnanimous gesture. "All of you try an' guess. It don't cost nothin'," she added, with a sidelong glance at Mrs. Blackler.

Mrs. Hood sucked in her lips, estimating. "About sixty-five, I should say," she hazarded in her thin, clear voice.

"Less than that," croaked Mrs. Quinlan.

"In the late fifties," Mrs. Blackler was tempted to put in perfunctorily.

"What!" Dolly shouted, gesticulating wildly. "I'm eighty-seven. Eighty-seven! That's what I am. And don't you be forgettin' it either." She trembled indignantly. She was deeply annoyed.

In a quick scrutiny of Mrs. Blackler's person her eyes perceived the dark growth on the latter's upper lip. She recovered her good humour almost immediately, and said with a gay malice, "Lost yer vanishing cream, dearie?"

This was the last straw. Mrs. Blackler and Mrs. Quinlan rose together, calling, "Come on, Mrs. Hood."

But she did not hear. Her eyes were fixed on Dolly, who had turned up her nose exaggeratedly and nodded her feather at their stiffly retreating backs.

"That's the last of two bad smells," she said. "An' good riddance."

"How do you live, D-Dolly?" Mrs. Hood ventured.

Dolly smiled expansively, at the same time stamping her foot on the ground. "I usually gets fourteen days, you see, dearie. Of course, I'm always given the option—twenty shillings or fourteen days," she hastily explained, in her naturally loud voice. "It's the cramp. My foot, I mean. I'm sure it must be that draughty cell they put me in last time. I'll 'ave to tell 'em about it. It might 'ave been the *death* of me. And then, you see, I draws the old age pension. Free board and lodging for a fortnight 'elps a lot. Now, if I was paying for lodgings, I'd 'ave no money. An' besides, after a little enjoyment I'm ready for a quiet rest." She worked her foot out of the worn shoe and placed it on the hard ground. "Ah! That's better. It's only fools and horses that work."

"Come *on*, Mrs. Hood!" Mrs. Blackler's intense, severe face appeared suddenly in the opening to the arbour.

"Your friend wants you," bawled Dolly.

"Oh! Yes, I'm coming." Impulsively Mrs. Hood drew out her little black purse and pressed a ten-shilling note into Dolly's grimy hand. "*Please*," she whispered.

"No, I couldn't." Dolly's eyes fluttered. "It's the first time anyone's given me anything except trouble. Thank you, ma'am. But——"

"I live with my daughter and her husband."

"Well. . . . Any kids?"

"A little boy and a girl. Twins."

"Ain't that lovely? Well, you tell 'em about Dolly."

"Yes, I'll tell them," Mrs. Hood promised, half-smiling. In the doorway she stopped and said quietly, "Good-bye, Dolly."

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“Pip-pip. Don’t you forget.”

Mrs. Hood walked after her two friends standing in the middle of the path, waiting impatiently, shoes tapping the gravel.

“A terrible . . . creature,” Mrs. Quinlan coughed.

“At last! I hope you didn’t give her anything.” Mrs. Blackler eyed her shrewdly. “You know you can’t afford it. And she’d only spend it on drink. That sort always do.”

“No, I didn’t,” Mrs. Hood replied measuredly.

“A common drunkard!”

Mrs. Hood said nothing, walking meekly beside them, on her small round face an expression of quiet joy, as though she had been privileged to see one who was not content to relinquish the splendid torch of life, but with all life’s excesses and defects, carried it onwards with a flourishing gesture, making it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on.

It was late on in the afternoon before she realised that she had not missed her morning sleep.

STRUTHERS BURT

Entertaining the Islanders

With this instalment, Entertaining the Islanders comes to an end. David Banastre and Gene and Anita Fulton are brought together on the island during a tornado that provides a vivid background to the climax, in which their difficulties are resolved. The story closes with a final soliloquy by Julius Wack.

Entertaining the Islanders, by Struthers Burt, is published in full in book form by Lovat Dickson Limited, at 8s. 6d. net. Earlier instalments have appeared in consecutive numbers of Lovat Dickson's Magazine, beginning with the June, 1934, issue.

WHEN he arrived at St. Birgitta, David stepped grinning into the arms of Mr. Jorgenson.

"Well, God bless my soul!" said Mr. Jorgenson. "Stopping with me?"

"If I may?"

"The tourist season," said Mr. Jorgenson, "has begun."

In the dauntless but uncertain launch, David and Mr. Jorgenson reached Mr. Jorgenson's long wharf. The heat in the lane between the warehouses was intense.

Mr. Jorgenson, wiping his face with an enormous handkerchief, looked at David curiously.

"Going to be here long?"

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"Only a couple of days."

"You're fortunate. At this time of year this place is filled with duppies. Zombies—ghosts. Ghosts of all the rains and heat the world has ever known, added to the rain and heat still in the making."

David's room was unchanged. He unpacked with a feeling of gentle lassitude and relief, as if, after many years of travel, he had come home. Just up the hill was Anita.

"Breakfast?" asked Mr. Jorgenson.

"Yes. I'm going to take a shower, and then I'll be with you."

But the water, too, was hot, and David noticed that the giant palm in the courtyard was still. The island seemed lonely and dispirited without the trade wind. David put on white trousers, and a shirt open at the neck, and sandals. He found it difficult to eat patiently his breakfast.

"Too bad about your friend, Mrs. Fulton's husband, isn't it?" said Mr. Jorgenson. "Lost his eyes in a motor accident two months ago, didn't he?"

"Yes," said David.

"They're leaving in a couple of days for Jamaica, where they can keep cool in the mountains. This is no place at this time of year for a woman."

"That's good," said David.

David drank his scalding coffee and went back to his room for a sun helmet, and started up the hill toward the small villa with its flamboyant garden. The heat struck through his sandals to the soles of his feet. There was no feeling now of spring or of growth, merely a vast, static, overpowering greenness and warmth, that depressed you and made the inside of your lungs hot. David came to the gate and ascended the stone steps and paused on the porch. Between the heat

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and his arrival, he found himself breathless. He stepped forward to knock, and then, in one of the long windows, he saw Anita looking at him. He noticed that she was as white and wan as the morning.

Her hand was up at her breast, and her eyes were immense, violet pools. Altogether disconcertingly, she began to cry . . . silently—slow tears running down her cheeks.

David was nonplussed, and for a moment hurt.

How different meetings always were from what you had expected !

“Don’t cry,” he said feebly.

He had never seen Anita cry before.

She came swiftly across the porch and took his hand. “Hush !” she said.

“Hush ?” asked David.

She spoke under her breath chokingly. “He mustn’t know you are here. You . . . of all people. Oh, David, why did you come ?”

Bewildered, David followed her down the garden to a small, latticed summer-house hidden by tamarinds and avocados. She still held his hand, and, still holding it, she turned upon him. “I didn’t know you were so cruel,” she said. “How could you ? How could you—when I was doing my best ?”

“Cruel ! Best ! What do you mean ?”

David’s patience broke and he stepped forward and took her by the shoulders.

“What’s the matter with you ?” he asked roughly. “I come down here to take you out of this, and you treat me like a ghost. What’s wrong ? I saw your uncle in New York. Even if he hadn’t asked me to, I’d have come anyway. And I didn’t send a cable because I knew everyone in St. Birgitta would read it. . . . What’s the matter with you ? Tell me. . . . Don’t cry.”

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For a moment longer she continued to look at him, and then the slow tears turned to sobbing, and she pushed him away and walked across the summer-house. She stamped her foot, as if angry with herself, and threw her head back, and put the palms of her hands up to her face so that her fingers covered her mouth. Between her fingers her breath sighed.

"Oh, for God's sake!" said David.

She made a little gesture of agony and turned to him.

"Wait! Wait—just a minute! Damn you, David, you're the first person who has made me cry publicly for years!" Her quick illumined smile lit her eyes and parted her lips. "Now . . . Oh, forgive me! . . . I'm all right. Sit down and let's talk sensibly."

"I can't bear it," thought David, "when she smiles!"

"You come and sit beside me." Anita patted the bench.

"Here on this bench. . . . Have you got a cigarette?"

David gave her one.

She leaned forward for the match, and then sat back, still trying to smile.

"I'll wipe your face," said David. "It's all stained."

She made a queer little sound through her nose.

"You dear darling! You're so sweet! Haven't you any idea what you've done? . . . You, and that Julius?"

"No," said David, "what have we done?"

She shook her head from side to side hopelessly.

"Can't you see that by doing this, for a while you make my life impossible again?"

David turned this over in his mind silently. Then he got to his feet and looked down at her.

"Oh, I see!" he said dryly. "You're a big enough fool to think that you have to keep on living with Gene, are you? How long do you intend to keep on living with him?"

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Her eyes were again bewildered by tears.

"I don't know."

David began to walk up and down the summer-house.

"You don't know? Well, I do. . . . I know exactly what you're going to do. You're going to live with Gene just long enough to get him to Jamaica, or some other sensible place. You've done your job as nurse. Now, it's me you've got to think of."

She shook her head, smiling without happiness.

"You don't understand."

David paused in front of her.

"Don't understand? What don't I understand? I understand perfectly that at first you had to take care of Gene, and I agreed with that, as you know. But no woman has to live with a man she doesn't love, and whom she despises—not nowadays." David paused. "And besides," he added, "you can't do it—not for long. It's impossible." His words stumbled. "Do you . . . do you actually live with him now?"

Anita's eyes refused to meet his.

"Sometimes . . . when I have to," she said sullenly.

David's shoulders sank in despair.

"Does he think now that he loves you?" He laughed shortly. "In Chicago I saw two girls; one he'd loved and was deserting; the other, he was getting ready to love. You've got a grand husband, Anita."

She raised her head angrily.

"All that," she said, "has nothing to do with the question. You're talking of what happened before he shot himself. Now, he's like a wounded animal. I couldn't leave him . . . not until he wants me to." Her expression changed and she looked at David pleadingly, her hands clasped above her knees; clasped so tightly that the knuckles turned white.

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"You couldn't leave anybody like that, David. Not for a long, long while. Not until . . ." she hesitated, ". . . not until they were used to being blind. Have you ever lived with a blind person? They're so helpless. Like a child. He's not terrible, you know, David. Often he's very touching and pathetic. There's nothing monstrous about him. I don't know whether he really loves me or not, but just at present I'm the only person he has. Oh, David, dear darling, do try to be reasonable. You and I have so much, and he hasn't got a thing. Look what you've got! Everything. Nobody can stop you. Perhaps your personal life can be upset—no one can ever arrange his personal life securely—but for the rest, you're invincible. And after a while—perhaps in a short while—it will be all right, anyway. I know. I know Gene, among other things. He'll get tired of me again."

"Thanks for your compliment about my being invincible," said David. "And you think it fair to me that I should wait until then? Wait upon his pleasure? Besides, it may last a lifetime." His voice became increasingly bitter. "Right now I'll wager there are half a dozen women in 'the States' who if they came down here, and wanted to, could take him away from you. Would you like me to send for them? But they won't want him now . . . he's poor and he's blind." He paused. "And this is what you ask me to accept?"

"Not all," said Anita in a small voice.

"Not all? . . . What do you mean?"

"I haven't told you all—I didn't want to. But you make me."

"What more can there be?"

Anita looked up slowly.

"Quite a lot," she said. Her face was grim. "He says," she continued in a hushed level voice, "that if I leave him, this time he will make sure that he kills himself. Do you

appreciate that, David?" She became supplicatory again. "If he did—and he will—could I live, or you live?"

This summer-house, David thought, was the most airless, breathless place in which he had ever been. He stared at Anita, his eyes blank spaces.

"Oh, and he said that?"

"Yes—many times."

"The damned coward!" said David reflectively.

"Yes—the coward, but he said it."

"Good riddance," said David.

Anita shook her head.

"No, David. Maybe that's true, but you can never say it. And you don't mean it. That's the one thing no one ever can mean. I don't mean that you and I would die if he did it, but I mean we couldn't forget it. I, especially. David"—her voice rose in expostulation—"there would be too many things I'd remember about him. You see that, don't you? There was a time . . ."

"Yes, yes—I know!" said David impatiently. He stared at the wall above Anita's head. "Well, at least I can hope secretly that he dies," he reflected. "I couldn't help myself thinking that, could I?" He was silent again. "Yes—I understand." He lowered his head and spoke more quickly and in his ordinary voice. "He's got us in a corner, hasn't he? It's almost as if he knew he had and was taking pleasure in it." He laughed shortly. "It's a pretty revenge, isn't it? Aren't you and I funny little people?"

"Funny little people? Why?"

"Aren't all people funny little people, especially such wise people as ourselves? We planned everything so well . . . no haste, no nonsense, no slips. We fixed up this, and we fixed up that. . . ." David voice's broke into bitter complaining. "But what we couldn't fix up—what nobody

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can fix up—is the damned, irrational, idiot adventitiousness of things, and people, and life.”

In the shadows of the living-room, stretched out in a long-chair, was Gene. As Anita and David entered he raised his head with a curious searching movement.

“Who’s that?” he asked.

“It’s David Banastre,” said Anita casually. “Uncle Julius sent him down here to help us get to Jamaica.”

Gene was silent for a moment.

“Well, that’s very thoughtful of your uncle, I’m sure. And very thoughtful of David, too. . . . You don’t mind me calling you David?—we seem to see so much of each other. As Anita and I have only one pair of eyes between us, we can’t, of course, find our way about.”

“A motion-picture beauty turned spider!” thought David.

The particular thing that impressed David, after Mr. Jorgenson had told him, was the quiet; that, and the feeling of waiting. If it hadn’t been for the yellowness in the air and the gasping heat, you would have been inclined to lie naked on your bed, waiting for the rain. But the yellowness, like minute pollen, and the heat, pressing upon your skull from all directions like a torturing helmet, made you as nervous as a cat.

The day of his arrival David had felt this tenseness, and on the second day, the tenseness increased until it was like the subcutaneous tingling of the nerves which prevents sitting still but makes movement an unhappiness. David all day was depressed by a vague malaise; an uneasiness.

“I want to get you out of here as soon as possible,” he told Anita.

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In the late afternoon he and Anita had gone to Diabelar and for a few minutes had sat on the beach. The afternoon was too listless even for swimming. In the distance the bulk of St. Hildegard looked black and dull, no longer green and shining, and the waters of the bay were like oil streaked with iridescent scum. On the sand and over the coral reef, small, occasional waves broke sullenly.

When David got back to Mr. Jorgenson's he found that active man walking abstractedly up and down his gallery.

He waved an absent-minded hand at David.

"Well, I guess you'll see one," he said, and grinned. "There's no news as yet, but the barometer is steadily going down, and this is the sort of weather that breeds them."

In the night, Mr. Jorgenson came into David's room and awakened him.

David had just fallen into a restless sleep after hours of turning and tossing. Mr. Jorgenson was now grinning perpetually, and occasionally he laughed and rubbed his hands together, as if glad that the suspense was over. His absent-mindedness had disappeared.

"It's coming," he said. "The radio's talking. It's heading in from the south-east. They think it may hit St. Kitts."

David, with a heart suddenly still, sat up in bed and looked at his watch. It was half-past four. Then he, too, smiled, but with difficulty.

"I've never seen one," he said. "It'll be interesting."

"I thought," said Mr. Jorgenson, "you'd want to go up to Mrs. Fulton's and see if everything was all right. Perhaps you'd better stay there when the blow comes. Just remember to keep your doors and shutters closed."

David sat on the edge of the bed.

"How long will it be before it gets here?" he asked.

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He noticed that neither he nor Mr. Jorgenson had so far referred to the impending cataclysm as anything but "it."

"Maybe four or five hours, maybe longer. It's hard to tell. Of course, it may not hit here at all. It may swing to the north or south. We haven't had one for a good many years, you know. Well, I'll be off to see that everything's shipshape." Mr. Jorgenson rubbed his hands together and chuckled. "A stitch in time saves nine—especially in a hurricane."

David stood up.

"Any real danger?" he asked hesitatingly.

"For a lot of poor devils, yes," said Mr. Jorgenson. "If it really hits here, there're some people walking about right now who'll be dead to-night. But for us—for solid houses like this and Mrs. Fulton's—no. This house has stood out several of them in the course of a century and a half."

After Mr. Jorgenson had gone, David dressed slowly and went out on to the balcony.

Above the cathedral, everywhere up the hill, lights were gleaming through the foliage.

This scientific precision was even more eerie, David felt, than the ancient uncertainty . . . like getting a telegram from hell. He had heard that in the days before the radio and accurate weather reports, the look-outs in the forts all up and down the islands had signalled with cannon when the wind reached hurricane velocity. Three shots! How grim those spaced shots must have sounded to the listening people! But nothing could be grimmer than this quiet preparation hours before anything had happened. In the silence! In the darkness! Grave men and women getting ready.

Hurricane signals were still, of course, hung out . . . by day, two red flags with black centres, one above the other; by night, two red lights with a white light between. David

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imagined the harbour on the other side of the house; black, completely still, with the ominous red lights, the white one between, staring patiently seaward in the darkness. Somewhere off to the south—over the hill—in the direction in which he was looking, a great whirling demon was coming closer. Not fast—it travelled slowly, insolently taking its time—but as it travelled, the winds that edged it roared and lumbered at express train speed. Roared with the sound of a hundred express trains, late and making up the last minutes of their schedules. And all out in the lonely waste of waters, ships turned and fled, and islands watched and waited as St. Birgitta was waiting. And in the darkness, everywhere—human at last because it understood—the crackling voice of the radio called and called, peremptorily and warningly.

Dawn, heavy and leaden, was coming as he stepped on to Anita's porch. Her house was ablaze with lights, so he knew she had been already told. He entered the living-room cheerfully. . . . It was better to be cheerful.

"I've brought a lot of cigarettes," he said, "in case you didn't have any. I'm told by connoisseurs of hurricanes one smokes a lot."

Gene, in his long-chair, greeted him unenthusiastically.

"Going to protect us?" he asked. He drew his silk dressing-gown closer.

Anita, standing by the table, a book in her hand, put it down.

"When do you think it will get here?"

"There's no telling," said David. "Around ten or eleven o'clock, I suppose. You'll let me ride it out with you?"

"Certainly."

Gene laughed shortly.

"Maybe we'll all get killed. I hope to God we do."

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"I don't want to die," said David irritably.

"Ah—an optimist!" said Gene. "Listen, Anita! He wants to live."

David turned to Anita.

"You've got plenty of candles . . . the big ones?"

"Yes."

"Well, let's make a preliminary survey of the windows and doors."

She followed him through the house and then around it in the grey dawn as he tested the shutters and bolts. As they came to the end of their inspection and stood on the porch, she reached out and touched his hand.

"I'm glad you're here," she said softly.

"Thank you." He raised his head, without looking at her, and spoke between lips only partly open. "I'm trying not to think . . . that is—that pretty soon we won't see each other for a while."

Her hand gripped his.

"It can't be for long—dear . . . dear darling."

Gene had not moved from his chair.

"Anything preventing us from having breakfast?" he asked.

Anita laughed.

"No, I imagine it's ready now."

After breakfast they came back to the living-room. The light was still leaden, so they kept the lamps burning.

Gene returned languidly to his chair.

"Turn on the radio," he suggested. "Pretty soon we won't have any."

"You won't have any now," said David. "Nothing but static."

Anita bent over the dial and for an instant madness shrieked and wailed and cackled in the room.

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"For God's sake shut that off!" screamed Gene.

"I told you," said David grimly. "That's the hurricane laughing at you."

"Don't be so damned unpleasant."

"I'm not unpleasant—I'm realistic."

At eight o'clock the telephone rang and David answered it.

The Governor's voice, weary and gently disillusioned, reached him.

"Oh—is that you, Mr. Banastre? Yes, I heard you were down here. No, don't bother Mrs. Fulton. I just called up to see if she was all right, and everything. Pretty soon the wires will be out of commission, I suppose. Everything all right? Good. . . . Very annoying, isn't it?"

"Very!" said David with the same polite indifference.

He turned away from the telephone.

Evidently the Governor did not recognise hurricanes socially or officially.

"I bet those manchineels and strangler-figs down in his botanical garden will toss their arms and laugh," David thought. Now, why had that inconsequent thought occurred to him? Aloud he said, "Shall we play a game of backgammon?"

Anita smiled.

"All right."

"And what am I going to do?" asked Gene querulously.

"Listen to us quarrel."

Every now and then, by accident, David touched Anita's hand. Once he put his hand over hers.

"You're not quarrelling," said Gene. "You're the quietest backgammon players I've ever known."

"Anita's beaten me six games out of eight," said David.

"Would you like me to read to you, Gene?" asked Anita.

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"For God's sake no. . . . When's that damned storm coming?"

"It's ten-thirty," said David.

He went out on to the porch and looked around. Below him the heavy foliage of the hill seemed to be standing erect, listening. There was no sound from the hidden streets. The waters of the harbour were black, as if a school of giant cuttlefish had spread ink upon them. David noticed that the small boats had disappeared and that a tramp steamer had moved out into the widest part of the roadstead.

He came back to the room.

"I think," he said, "we'd better begin to bolt all the windows and doors to the south and south-east, and on the other side of the house. It'll be hot, but we'll have to get used to that." He went back to the window, Anita with him. They stared for a moment at the harbour.

"I've heard," he said, "that before a hurricane great black birds, never seen otherwise, come swooping in. I suppose they're frigate birds that ordinarily are high up. I wonder if it's true? Of course, birds in great quantities are blown to the centre of a hurricane. They light on ships."

Anita looked at him with wide eyes.

"I think that's rather horrible," she said.

David and Anita went to the back of the house, and to the two sides, and shut the doors and windows. As they shut them, David knew by the pressure of the air, and the heat that was even greater than the heat he had imagined to be the limit of heat, and by the quiet, that was even more than breathless quiet, that the hurricane was near.

He and Anita returned to the living-room.

"Perhaps we'd better shut these doors and windows, too," he said. "I'm merely an amateur and I don't want to take any chances until we know just where the wind is coming

from. And even after that, if we leave a window open a little, we'll have to watch for the shift in the wind."

He lit a couple of the big candles and placed them about the room, and then he and Anita began to close the windows. But before they did so they stood again for a moment looking out. As they looked, a tiny breath of wind passed across the garden, and was gone, and the bois trembler shivered.

"There's not a sign of life," said David. "Everything must be hiding."

"Poor things!" said Anita. "Poor birds!"

Suddenly the bois trembler bent to the ground and with it all the other trees and shrubs, and across the harbour David imagined the wind spread out like the manes of running horses. He pulled the first shutter to, and shot the bolt, and hurried to the other. By the time he got there, the whole landscape was bowing and waving and gesticulating, and gradually as he looked, it flattened itself to the earth, and rain in grey leaping battalions harassed and overwhelmed it. David heard the limbs of the trees grind and shriek, and as he watched, an avocado snapped with a sound like a rifle. He closed the shutter.

The house was breathless. The smell of plaster, no longer held in check by air, began to take possession of it.

David smiled at Anita.

"Shall we play some more backgammon?"

The electric lights flickered and went out.

Anita drew her breath in sharply, and looked about the room, dark now in its corners, and filled with shadows. Then she turned to David and smiled.

"All right."

They sat down once more at the table. Every now and then they raised their heads and listened.

Occasionally by accident their hands touched.

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"So long as I'm here," said David, "I wish there was a peephole so that I could look out. I may not see another hurricane."

"Damn you!" said Gene fiercely. "I wish you weren't seeing this one—I wish none of us were seeing it."

David laughed and looked at him in mild amazement.

"Sorry," he said.

Gene was muffled and sullen.

"So am I. I beg your pardon."

"Certainly."

Every quarter of an hour or so, David, with Anita, made an inspection of the windows and doors. After they had looked at the bolts, they would smile at each other and sometimes touch each other with lightly small, friendly, encouraging pats.

Always they listened to the wind.

Often it seemed as if the solid house was bending; was pushing in upon itself. All about the house, without cessation, was a strange high foolish roaring with deep under-notes, as if a maniac was exhaling with ululations that took no note of the need for the drawing in of the breath. David found himself thinking again and again that this sound could not continue, but it did continue.

In his long-chair, Gene stirred restlessly and sighed.

"How about a drink?" he suggested.

David stood up.

"That's a good idea. We'll all have one. I understand some of the islanders get drunk, and stay drunk. Wise men!" From a decanter David poured three drinks of whisky.

The heat was sickening; heavy and wet. David felt his shirt a pulp upon his back and he saw great beads of sweat running down the faces of Anita and Gene. Anita's silk waist clung to her so limply that you could see the small

dark points of her breasts beneath her brassiere. David did not know that hours could go so slowly, although in the war he had thought he had known what slow hours were. The candles burned steadily with upright yellow flames. Across the backgammon board he and Anita moved the round white and black ivories until David felt that all his life he had been sitting at a table, staring down at ridged black and white circles in a room of shadows and candlelight. And yet only an hour and a half had gone by.

"This is hell!" said David to himself.

He tried not to think how even hell would have been lightened if he and Anita were only alone—so that they could really talk to each other; so that they could really laugh and occasionally make their own jokes and comments.

Suddenly David raised his head and listened. A quiet that now seemed as unearthly as at first the roaring and whining of the wind had seemed, had fallen.

"We're in the centre of the hurricane," he said. "It's passing over. The wind will come from another quarter soon, and be even worse. Perhaps we can dare to open a shutter for a little while. Do you want to come?"

Anita nodded.

They opened a shutter to the south and looked out. Up the hill was a tangle of broken and twisted trees, and across one of them was a newly painted tin roof. To the tin roof clung a woman's skirt.

David took a deep breath and closed the shutter.

When they reached the living-room again, the wind was hurling itself against the porch and the shutters on that side. But David felt relieved. The storm was moving away. It no longer seemed perpetual.

Gene, in his long-chair, drew in a breath of fierce desperation.

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"I can't stand this much longer," he murmured.

"Why doesn't Anita play something?" David suggested.
"And we'll all have another drink."

"Play against that?" Anita nodded toward the wind.
"... Oh, very well." She shrugged her shoulders and crossed over to the piano.

"'As I came up through Dublin city,'" said David.
"Play that."

Anita seated, before the piano, bent her head in agreement without speaking.

David mixed three more drinks. He gave Gene his, and put Anita's down on the ledge of the piano, and then leaned upon the piano ledge, looking down at Anita.

*"As I came up through Dublin city
At the hour of twelve in the night,
What should I see but a Spanish lady
Washing her feet by the candlelight.
First she washed them, then she dried them,
Over a fire of amber coal . . ."*

"Stop, for Christ's sake!"

Anita raised her head, her mouth open, her fingers resting on the keys. David whirled about, his left hand on the edge of the piano.

Gene had risen to his feet and was standing with his hands holding together the belt of his dressing-gown. His head was slightly thrown back and in the candlelight it was as carved and white as a death mask.

"Stop that noise!" he commanded, but in a quieter voice.

"It's stopped," said Anita.

"Come here—both of you."

Anita looked up at David, and then they crossed the room to where Gene was standing.

"Gene, are you ill?" asked Anita.

Gene laughed shortly.

"Ill? Yes, I'm ill. I'm blind." He paused and lowered his head and stared at them as if trying to read their faces, moving his head slightly with the searching motion which was now his habit. "But I'm not altogether blind," he resumed in a quieter voice, a trace of bitter laughter in it. "I see some things. Haven't I been sitting here all through this damned storm listening to your silence, and your breathing, and your sniffing?"

"Steady, Gene," said David warningly.

Gene's voice rose.

"To your damned wanting of each other!"

He was silent for a moment.

"I beg your pardon. I didn't mean that. I—I sit here all day and forget how to behave myself. I'll try to say decently what I have to say. I'm sorry."

"Oh, don't!" said Anita breathlessly.

"Don't what?"

"Don't be so gentle and nice."

Gene smiled slowly and wryly.

"All right. . . . I won't make you sorry for me. I'll say what I have to say as quickly as possible." He was thoughtful for a moment, still staring at them sightlessly. "You're in love with each other, aren't you? No, don't interrupt me. The less you interrupt me, the sooner I'll get through. I know you're in love with each other. I think I knew that from the beginning, and all this morning I've been listening to the things you haven't said or done. But I'm in the way, because I'm blind and helpless. Isn't that so?" He raised his head. "Well—I'm not helpless. I know one woman at least who really wants me, blind as I am. And she'll look after me, and she can do it. Isn't that so, David? You know her."

"Yes, I know her," said David.

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Gene's voice suddenly grew bitter again.

"She won't shrink every time I touch her. She won't do that."

Anita spoke under her breath.

"I'm sorry," she said reflectively.

Gene laughed shortly.

"You needn't be sorry. I don't care now whether you shrink or not. You can shrink all you want. Maybe I'll shrink, too."

David moved uncomfortably.

"Hadn't I better leave you two alone? And don't say too much, Gene."

Gene's voice was sharp.

"No, you stay here! You'd better give me a chance to explain myself. You think this is in bad taste, don't you? It offends you. It makes you angry. Well, you wait until you are blind." He paused and moved his head as if searching for Anita. "You can shrink all you want," he resumed. He paused and smiled with a twisted mouth, making a little derisive sound in his throat. "I never did find faithfulness very easy. I'm not even sure that I approve of it philosophically, but when I was first hurt, I could think of nobody but you. Now I want to get away from this damned place where you've kept me. . . . I want to . . ." His voice rose in thin complaint, higher and higher, a wailing edge to it. "I want to get away from this damned place, and I want to get away from you. I've lain here for years feeling this heat and smelling these damned hot sticky smells, and now this storm! . . . I tell you I want to get out of here!" He hesitated and moved back, and reached out his hand for the back of his chair. "I want to get away from a woman who shrinks every time I touch her, and from these crazy rains. I don't want you to be sorry for me."

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In the silence the maniac outside sobbed and whined.

"You can't even hear that the way I can," said Gene quietly. "You've got to be blind to really hear wind."

"I think it's dying down," said David. He sighed patiently. "Are you through, Gene?"

"Yes . . . but don't sigh."

David looked at Anita, and then at Gene.

"As I understand it, then, you want Anita to divorce you?"

"Yes." Gene chuckled deprecatingly. "Knowing myself, of course, I may want her back again in a year, but that will be too late."

"Yes . . . that will be too late. All right, Gene. Anita can take you back to Chicago as soon as travel is established again . . . that should be in a day or so. I imagine I will have to stay here for a while and help the Governor. Does that suit you, Anita?"

Anita swayed slightly and closed her eyes.

"Yes."

"I think we might open a window now," said David.

Mr. Wack leaned upon the rail of the *Savonarola* in the violet Mediterranean dusk and contemplated the lights of Monte Carlo. The lights of Monte Carlo were making him gently melancholy and slightly nostalgic. They seemed to represent something that was gone and would never come again. Something that below the surface, perhaps, was not admirable, but which, on the surface, had had its opera bouffe charm. Succinctly, the lights of Monte Carlo belonged to the Second Empire, to the time of Louis Napoleon; to the period of imperials and pastiche and coloured lanterns in gardens, and the old waltz, and an implicit belief in wealth, and titles, and great prostitutes who commanded kings. Of course, the

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lights of Monte Carlo had been burning steadily ever since, and were still burning, but the old assurance back of them was gone. Men no longer staked fortunes on the turn of a wheel, and then went out and shot themselves with aristocratic hauteur, and no one any longer believed—not even in Roumania—that countries were well lost for ladies who gave you condescendingly everything but love.

Mr. Wack sighed and raised his head.

The lights of Monte Carlo went up and up the encircling dark hills until they met the quiet sky in which, over the edge of the hills, was a thin new moon. In a few minutes Mr. Wack would have to go below to bathe and dress. He was dining that night with his old friend, the former singer in opera, whom he had not seen for years. Elenora Cavallo was her name. Perhaps he might ask Elenora Cavallo to marry him. He did not know. The idea was not too fantastic. He was becoming increasingly lonely, and that would give her safe anchorage . . . poor thing! He did not know. He would wait and see. He was not afraid of disillusionment? He was too old for that. And nowadays marrying a woman took one person at least out of unemployment.

Too old for disillusion? Quite so. He belonged almost to the generation of ladies who had walked about Monte Carlo in hoop skirts, absurd little parasols over their shoulders, laughing and chatting with gentlemen who smoked cheroots. Cheroots! The word was like the faint odour of cigars extinguished.

Mr. Wack lit a cigarette.

In twenty years—in thirty at the most, he would be dead. Gone to join the ladies in hoop skirts, absurd little parasols over their shoulders, and the gentlemen who had smoked cheroots.

It had become a hard-boiled world as he had so often told

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David. A very hard-boiled world . . . murderous and dangerous and tight-lipped. But then, curiously enough, it had also become a much more imaginative and vicarious world, passionately perturbed at the lack of justice; cruel in its fight against cruelty; stern in its struggle with the fool. One could only hope that it was going somewhere.

Mr. Wack looked over his right shoulder. Down there was Italy. No guitar playing now. And just at hand was France, ringed with bayonets. And leaning over on France was Germany, with brown-shirted men marching like locusts. And off there to the west was Spain, destroying all the things that had made her great, in the hope of some new, uncertain greatness. And like clouds on the horizon, were England and America, troubled and wary, fearful that all they had struggled up to . . . an agonised longing for peace, an agonised longing for some logic in events, might be challenged. . . . And way off—way off was the Orient! Impossible to think about the Orient. On every horizon lightning flickered.

Mr. Wack sighed again and raised his head. He was remembering a verse from the Rig-Veda.

*“Stand steadfast and immovable ; fall not away.
Be like a mountain unremoved.
Stand steadfast here like Deity.”*

THE END

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SHORT STORY MECHANICS

ON several occasions during the past year, this magazine has opened its columns to a discussion of the short story. Essays by such well-known short-story writers as H. E. Bates and L. A. G. Strong, amongst others, have appeared, and the traditions, the outlines, and the purpose of the short story have been discussed at some length. No agreement was to be found among our contributors as to how the short story could be defined, but the view was generally put forward that the short story was experiencing a renaissance; or, rather, since it had never taken strong root in English literature, that it was displaying the first evidence of individual and independent growth traceable in its history. How alien it has been, compared with other forms of our literature, was to be seen from the names quoted as masters of the different types of short stories: Tchekov, a Russian; Maupassant, a Frenchman; Hemmingway, an American; Coppard alone an Englishman. The direction the modern English short story had taken

was to be traced to the influence of those and a few other names.

I cannot help thinking, as I read the three or four hundred short stories that are submitted to this magazine each month, that tradition plays a less important part in shaping the modern short story than is generally realised. This is an age of freedom and experiment in literary work. Experiment can be carried to the seemingly ludicrous lengths it reaches to the conservative mind in the work of the American, Gertrude Stein; and freedom can be, and, alas, is, often greatly abused. But without sliding to the farthest end of the pole of liberty it is possible, as many successful contemporary short stories show, to use the short story form as a vehicle for depicting a mood or interpreting a character without insisting that it shall carry the burden of a continuous narrative. It would not be going too far to say that the short story to-day has taken over the function of poetry. In its brief space it can be lyrical; it can concentrate its emotional effect as a play or a novel cannot; and, absolved from the necessity of imitating

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in miniature the novel, it can, by subtle inference and a careful choice of detail, dramatise a mood, an emotion or a character and compel the reader's interest by that art alone. To use a photographic analogy, it can snapshot a scene where the novel, in order to encompass all its detail, must use a long exposure. Formerly, that has been the function of poetry. Now the short story can do it too.

The ideal to be aimed for, as in all forms of interpretative art, is to win over the mind of the audience. Unless the reader's attention is caught and his emotions, in whatever sense they are appealed to, are aroused by the story, under this new liberty it can be a bleak failure such as the plain narrative with its less subtle reflection of actuality could never experience. Moods are infinitely more difficult to portray than events are to narrate; the reward of endeavour is that they are more convincing and more intense in effect than the mere narration of events when their portrayal is successful. And they can be successfully portrayed only when they are carefully motivated. If, to take a simple example, you start with the statement that your grandmother is mad, and then proceed to emphasise her condition by describing her paroxysms, the reader will be unconvinced, or at least disinterested. If he has sustained the first shock of the

statement, nothing the author can say after that will alter his state of mind towards your grandmother, which will remain sympathetic, appalled, or amused, but not vitally interested. If you, however, infer by a neat description that something is wrong with your grandmother, his interest will be aroused, and he will follow your narration eagerly to discover the reason for her strange behaviour.

The example might be considered silly, but it is drawn at random to illustrate a fact often ignored by short-story writers to-day. The mechanics of story-writing must still be considered in spite of the new freedom, and one of the essential rules is that any form of narrative to be convincing must have suspense and climax. Suspense is the path the projectile, which is your story, takes towards the target, which is your climax. The dénouement, which is the solution of the climax, is the path it takes away from it. In the concentric figure which is your story these are the fixed quantities. They are the essential mechanics of any story told from the time of Herodotus to that of Somerset Maugham.

That thought suggests a new competition which our readers as well as our contributors may find both instructive and of interest. I give you here the indications of three characters and a situation in which they

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are involved. That situation may be transformed into a story depending for its interest on the conjunction of events [you are at liberty to introduce what events you like]; or into one depending for its effect upon the depiction of emotions. Write the story in whatever way you think it would be most effective, and submit it to us not later than December 31st. Its length should not exceed 2,500 words; its title you must supply. Three prizes will be offered for the three best stories submitted; a first prize of £2 2s.; a second prize of any two books chosen from the list of Lovat Dickson Limited; and a third prize of an annual subscription to the magazine.

The Characters: David Grey, a young married man about twenty-six years of age.

Janet Grey, his wife.

Thaddeus Kershaw, an elderly mysogynist bachelor, uncle to Janet Grey, and from whom Janet has expectations.

The Situation: David Grey is employed by a large department store as a clerk at £4 per week. On Christmas Eve he is given notice that after the holidays his services will no longer be required.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

WE open this month with LUIGI PIRANDELLO, the famous

Italian author who has just been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for 1934. . . . VINCENT SHEEAN, the author of "An Adventure of a Foreign Correspondent" (November), contributes this month an account of his experiences as a Foreign Correspondent in the Far East. "Romance and Revolution," which will be continued in our January and February numbers, tells one of the most vivid stories of fact I have ever read. . . . RAOUL AUERNHEIMER (author of "Nelson's Coffin," October) is the most popular of Austrian narrative and romantic writers. . . . Nearly all WINTFRED HOLTBY's work bears the mark of irony. She made her reputation as a novelist with *Poor Caroline and Truth is not Sober*. She is the author of that delightful satire *The Astonishing Island*. . . . GREY OWL is an Indian whose name will become widely known in January when we publish his book *Pilgrims of the Wild*, which tells the story of his work in the conservation of animal life in North-West Canada. "The Wilderness Awakes" is not properly a short story, but it is brilliantly effective as an evocation of sight, sound and scent in a forest in the wilderness. . . . MILWARD KENNEDY, the famous detective story-writer, continues and concludes his psychological analysis of murderers. . . . EDITA MORRIS is by birth a Swede. She is the wife of I. V. Morris, a young

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American who has himself written several successful short stories. Mrs. Morris is in her twenties, and we think her extraordinary command over her adopted language evidenced by her story *Lili Died in April* is in itself worthy of note. Mr. and Mrs. Morris live in the South of France. . . . W. J. BEAMAND is our youngest contributor. He is twenty-one, has contributed short stories to the national dailies, and is represented in the "Best Short Stories of 1934." . . . With regret we publish the last extract of Struthers Burt's magnificent *Entertaining the Islanders*. We have published altogether about 45,000 words. The novel is over

100,000 words and, if you care to know more of Mr. Julius Wack and of life on the Island of St. Birgitta, you will enjoy possessing a copy of the book.

THE SHORT STORY COMPETITION

So numerous have been the entries for the short story competition announced in the October number that we are not able yet to announce a final judgment on all the entries. An announcement of the awards will be made in the January issue of this magazine, but competitors will be advised of the success or rejection of their MSS. before that date.

L. D.

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